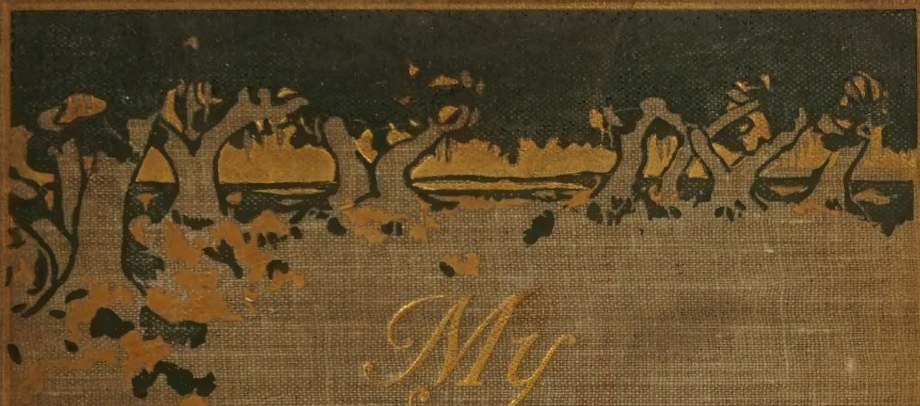

My Winter Garden

Maurice Thompson

"Speaking of 'gardens'!"

M. H. E.

My Winter Garden

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My Winter Garden

A NATURE-LOVER UNDER
SOUTHERN SKIES

BY
MAURICE THOMPSON

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To my wife, Alice Lee, I dedicate this book, because it is as much hers as mine. She shared the experiences herein recorded, and her influence is in every page. "My Winter Garden" is our winter garden. We tramped together in all the places I have described; we camped together on lonely spots; we sat together on the breezy bluffs and read, sketched, and made notes. She carried my extra arrows on many a shooting-ground, where the birds were wary and wild. Why should not her name be here? To withhold it would be to rob my book of a right, and to deny myself an ineffable pleasure.

Preface

WADING in deep "tides of grass," as Swinburne phrases it, and stirring with one's boots a "foam of flowers," has not become a mere tradition. I could, were I a poet, add something to reality in song by rhyming my annual experiences in the South; but even in plain prose I am no adept, wherefore I shall be glad enough if my facts make amends for my style. A lover of nature and books may feel, while reading these pages, some wafts of a freshness not mine, out of which I hope to get due credit for what I have not done. There seems to be no moral turpitude in connection with stealing from the book of

the wilderness and the music-sheets of the winds. A man's song is his property; a bird's song is the robber's own. If I snatch a sketch from nature's easel, even before its colors are dry, I go my way refreshed by my theft.

And the next thing after doing a deed is to tell about it so that it shall not lose the smack of native distinction, that fragrant and pungent something which in fruit we call a zest. To this end I have relied largely upon notes scratched down, hurriedly sometimes and sometimes with self-conscious deliberation, in all sorts of places and under the varied circumstances of a wandering, out-of-doors life given to-day to a book and a pleasant forest shade, to-morrow to my sporting-tackle, and the day after, perhaps, to a sail on some lonely and lovely bay, with a stiff breeze and the old Greek's "multitudinous laugh of the sea" clashing bravely in my ears.

Preface

For the deeds told in this book are mostly of the lightest nature, such as men do in their hours of play between strenuous labors not so easy to note down. Doings of my season of recreation are here put together at haphazard. Thoughts of my idlest days have the right of way over these pages.

But may I hope that my thoughts and deeds are not so idle as to be trivial? Whatever is wholesome cannot be without a certain value. I shall be glad if my notes and sketches have in them a strong trace of the gentle exhilaration caught from exercise in the open air and from those indescribable explosions of freshness felt at sunrise, when the archer's boots are wet with dew and the shore-birds are clamorous on a white beach-line beyond the marsh. Nor can I deny the comfort it would give me to know that lovers of good old books will sympathize with my

My Winter Garden

My Winter Garden

AN IDYL OF THE GULF COAST

A BREEZY headland curving parallel with the line of a fair horizon; some cat-boats and luggers leaning against the sky; a smell of acacia whisked along in broken puffs; a wandering sound of uncertain quality passing between the white-capped sea and the dusky pine woods afar; roses tossed about on emerald sprays; great sea-birds winging aloft—and I in the midst of this my Winter Garden, loafing under a yaupon-tree.

Two days ago, at the hour of noon, a snow-storm, an Eskimo wind, the earth frozen to granite solidity, and icicles clinking on the boughs of my Indiana apple-orchard, when our southward flight was

begun. We left the blue jays, muffled and ill-tempered, jeering in the bare hedge of *bois d'arc* at Sherwood Place, where but lately the grackles and robins made a great din on the eve of migration. Two days ago, bear in mind, wrapped to the eyes in fur of otter and seal, gasping against the ringing, frost-spiked strokes of a norther, we gave chase to the migrating thrushes; and now I loll drowsily by the Gulf-side, making note of some gray pelicans striking mullet in the tepid surf-waves five rods from the beach. Beside a wall of shell concrete, crumbling and vine-matted, great rusty yellow oranges still hang on a tree. In the yaupon overhead are masses of scarlet berries, temptingly fresh and luscious in appearance, but bitter as disappointment can be.

The season is winter; a weather report in the morning paper tells of five degrees below zero at some point in Wisconsin, and of a blizzard spinning down from Canada across country to the Wabash and the Kankakee; and yet my nostrils realize what the violets spill and

the roses loose in the open air—sweets rarer than summer's best.

Skirting the indefinite area called the semi-tropic, a thermal dream hangs in the air. You enter it when, on your southward flight, your railway-train whisks round a sharp curve by the Gulf-shore. The first hint of it is a dash of salt in the air; then you catch the shimmer flung from rollicking whitecaps; and presently, far away, in a turquoise film, an island comes to view with a lighthouse, a clump of palmettos, and some mossy live-oaks behind its dazzling sand-spit, which cuts the haze and seems obtrusively real in the midst of a dream. The change is so easy and so sudden that it gives the fine surprise of a new rhyme in a song.

Doubtless our migrant birds have an obscure sense of the beauty which even we cannot fully realize—the dreamy, elusive display of formless and tenuous substance hovering along the line where summer is a perpetually resident spirit. The first thing I note, on arriving at my Winter Garden each year, is the apparent

wondering curiosity with which the birds, just dropping down from the North, go about in the golden weather, silently flitting from tree to tree, peering askance amid the dusky foliage, evidently affected by the change of surroundings. They behave much as do the human tourists who come a little later on their limited railway-tickets. Everything is theirs for the time being. They chatter when they meet, invade all private closes, and presently disappear, going still farther southward, even beyond the great Gulf.

It would probably be best to make the journey into the South a desultory, hesitating flight, lingering by the way in all the attractive places, thus softly stealing through the climatic change; but there is something exhilarating in a sudden plunge from boreal cold to an atmosphere of balm and bloom-dust. Some people, who flock and flutter hurriedly round the swift loop of a winter tour, find the warm weather enervating. It has the effect of a light yet heady wine on me. No sooner have I passed through the palmetto-shaded

gate of my Winter Garden than my blood bubbles, as it did when in boyhood I climbed to the top of Yonah, and swung my hunting-cap for joy, stimulated beyond silent endurance by the upper streams of air. The strong tipples freely wasted by the bucaneers have made this Caribbean breeze deliciously intoxicating. All nature blinks, nods, drowses in its fitful current. Yet nothing seems to sleep. The long moss moves warily; the oleanders never quite close their eyes; the palmettos wag their bayonets at the shrinking and swaying roses; nor at any time do the great pines and stately magnolias fall silent.

While early midwinter is not the season of flowers, even on the Creole coast, we frequently have a swell of precocious springtide in December and January, which lifts the sap from root to tip in the plants and trees, greening the twigs and freshening the bark and leaves. A pear-orchard will fling out tender vernal banners, with a dash of snowy petals among the sprays, affording a certain fruity efflu-

ence bandied about by the gusts. Beside a wall, or in the warmest angle of a cot, the lush banana-stalks, clumpered picturesquely against a hedge of Cherokee rose-vines, suddenly renew their upper leaves; and scattered here and yonder some gnarled peach-trees blow wavering whiffs of tender pink from their bare branches.

It may be that early in February, or even late in January, a mulberry-tree begins to show fruit. Once I saw the ripe berries "cooked to a turn" by a singeing frost on the second day of March; but that was a memorably unusual freak of weather. The mocking-birds were beginning to build, the brave males in full feather and song, when the norther swooped upon us, and it was pitiful to see how dazed they looked. It was as if the blast from Michigan or Kansas had blown their frozen songs in choking crystals back down their throats.

The Winter Garden is a shifting and elastic domain; for in the low country of the South no such thing as a boundary is seriously considered. All the adjoining

lands are yours; what you can see you hold. I claim as my heronry a marsh-meadow of an extent unknown. So vast is it that schooners and luggers and lumber-tugs go through it along many bayous. Sportsmen have shooting-boxes in lonely spots on these waterways, where wild fowl congregate temptingly. I hear the far booming of guns, and with my glass see puffs of pale smoke jet suddenly and then drift away.

Coming from our thick-walled Northern house at Sherwood Place to the typical cottage of the Creole is a change as sharp as that of climate. The rooms have been duly aired against our arrival, but there hangs all about a musty odor; the beds threaten us with mildew; the ceiling and wainscoting exhale a chill; the halls and chambers seem atrociously drafty from all directions. Every year we experience the same discomfort; every year we duly find out that it means nothing dangerous; yet, all the same, every year we feel mortally aggrieved that our advent has not been specially prepared for by the genius

of the semi-tropics, and the opportunity to grumble is flooded with appreciatory acceptance. To be sure, a little later, when the tourists mutter and complain at everything and everybody, we console them with self-satisfied promptness, saying that it is all a delusion, that in fact the beds are not musty, the halls not drafty, and that a fire on the hearth would be an insult to a climate so balmy. What! toast your shins indoors, while in the open air great beds of violets are ablow, roses flaunting, jonquils flaming, and an oleander hedge is winking full-flowered at the sun?

Sometime I shall have to thank a meteorologist, the Weather Bureau, or whomsoever can explain to me why it is that up yonder in my Northern home in winter if the thermometer in a room registers as low as sixty-four there must be a good fire built at once, while down South we sit out of doors at the same temperature without a shiver. Moreover, why does one from the North, freshly released out of a zero blizzard, have to muffle up

in storm furs and fleece-lined overshoes when first dropping into weather just below seventy in a low latitude? Man, bird, every migrant, knows of these curious contradictions of temperature and feeling. The experience doubtless has a dry and perfectly wooden explanation suitable to works of science and dusty brains; but you and I, being subject to our senses, cannot comprehend it. Let us, therefore, drop the subject as the slow-footed half-breed passing yonder drops the rind of a grape-fruit orange, because really it has no further interest, and go in to luncheon of oyster gumbo and broiled flounder. After that, if you smoke, here is the veranda facing the dancing sea, beyond which loom two or three gulf-caps against the daintiest sky that ever curved over a world. A few sips of black coffee add something to your comprehension of the garden spreading far and fair around you. Coffee in the open air, holding its heat, testifies to winter's good character, as likewise does the chameleon on the leaf of sago-palm yonder. A lizard never mis-

takes the weather, no matter what blunders are on the thermometer's record; and of all lizards this little blotch of changeable color is most sensitive to his atmospheric and substantial environment. Riley's tree-frog may have more power over the rain-clouds than my gay imitation of a three-inch saurian—he may have told the whole truth when he squeaked:

"I fetched her, oh, I fetched her!"

and maybe, in sheer despair, the cloud did cry downward:

"If you 'll quit, I 'll rain!"

But our modest chameleon has no quarrel with the sun, being content to take the warm shine in lazy, basking silence, or in creeping with many a shift of color, snapping the insects unaware as they hum and dance amid the leaves. If a norther fall suddenly he will scurry down into the nest he knows of in the palm's frowzy crown, and patiently await the return of pleasant warmth.

Many birds also have a barometric and

thermometric faculty, knowing sometime beforehand of a change in the pressure and temperature of the atmosphere. We sit on the veranda facing the Gulf, and can foresay a stiff blow from the southward by the coming in of shore-birds off those dim and treacherous islands far away yonder. Instinct assures the killdees and sandpipers of a great dash which shall submerge all the spits and marshes where they feed; so here they come flickering to our headland where the beach-line is sheltered. I see them first just this side of the horizon, a low, swinging and loitering rank of silvery wings, winking like pale flames above the blue water. Gradually they seem to rise, growing more and more distinct, and a few minutes later they arrive. Next day a storm is sure to be on. The curve of islands has disappeared under a tremendous splash of sea; gulls, pelicans, teal, and other wild aquatic things have joined the plovers; our beach looks as if a winged army had suddenly landed upon it.

The house commanding our garden is a rude structure into which not the least

architectural art has ever entered, not even by stealth. It spreads its body and wings widely out, like those of a chicken in the sun, having an air decidedly self-complacent, its low and disproportionately broad verandas smothered in vines.

Great live-oaks embower it, letting fall a beard of Spanish moss to dangle on the roof-slopes. Loopholes are made in the vines so as to give a full view of every space and vista, while out in an area, beside a huge century-plant, stands a sun-dial brought here a hundred and thirty years ago by a seafaring Frenchman, whose name, François Victor de Montmartin, is cut in the base. I could tell you a story, as told to me, of this same François, but you would not care for it —a story of almost ancient flavor, about a young wife he brought here from San Domingo or some other distant land, and housed in a cabin, or rather a spacious log pen thatched with palms. He loved her madly, surrounded her with rich things from all climes, clothed her in queenly splendors, and watched her by day and by

night, as if he feared she would vanish upon first exposure to solitude.

As for the lady, she seemed neither greatly interested nor wholly indifferent. Her beauty of face and form suited well her priceless finery of dress and jewels; but she did not show pride or haughtiness. Every one loved her. In that strange sylvan home amid the palms, cacti, and roses, she lived nearly two years, and meantime bore a child which was gloriously beautiful. The dark husband beamed with passionate joy, scarcely ever passing an hour out of sight of his wife and babe. It was all a great mystery, however, and the people somehow got ear of a rumor, vague enough to be romantic, which hinted that the young wife was not happy and that the husband feared lest she should escape from him.

Rarely is a story so crisp and short when love and mystery combine, but this one ended in an explosion, as it were; for on a fine day in April a fleet and beautiful vessel sailed into this bight of ours. A boat was lowered, manned by six stalwart

sailors armed to the teeth, and directed by a grand-looking old man, whose white beard fell in ripples to his waistband. The ship, the sailors, and the venerable, giantesque commander had every mark of wealth and power about them.

Now, when M. François Victor de Montmartin saw the vessel, which had actually come to anchor close inshore before he observed it, he uttered a great cry, and rushed to the chamber of his wife and babe; but they were not there, and when he looked out of a window he saw a gloriously robed form with a child in its arms flying down the headland slope to the beach. Again he let go that terrible cry of anguish, dashed out in furious pursuit, and was shot dead, midway between the house and the beach.

Away sailed the superb vessel, with the young woman and her child on board, and that was all ever known about them. A clump of acacia is said to mark the spot on the highest swell of our bluff where François Victor de Montmartin was buried. But then, to say the whole truth, every

angle and curve of this Creole coast, from Tampa around to Bay St. Louis, has its story of strange arrivals and romantic disappearances—a current of picturesque legend doubtless strongly tinctured with truth.

One feature of our domain, rarely observable elsewhere, is the blending of savage nature with the most advanced results of landscape culture. Two hundred years have slipped back into shadow since civilized man first appeared hereabout; but before that, possibly for many centuries, Indians had the good taste to regard our airy white bluffs with favor, coming in summer to camp all around under the live-oaks, magnolias, and liquid-amber trees, and to bathe in the salt surf. Numerous plants not native to the spot have been brought by white man and red from afar and planted. Since then, during periods throughout which the whole coast was abandoned, these representatives of an alien flora have slipped out of the closes and crept away year by year into the woods, across glade and marsh,

adapting themselves to soil and climate, thus becoming, after a long lapse of time, as indigenous as the Creoles themselves. I have seen acacia in full flower scenting an apparently primitive nook in a forest; but there I have also noted long, well-defined cotton-ridges, with pine-trees eighteen inches through the bole growing thick upon them and between, indicating a time when the slave plowmen worked and sang there in vast open fields given to the operations of that strange system of agriculture generated by a civilization the most picturesque ever wiped out by relentless Progress.

Sojourning in such a region, one has a sense of vague records upon records stamped in the soil, making it a sort of palimpsest where the old-time roving Spaniard, the daring Frenchman, the bucaneer, the early colonist, and the lordly mid-century planter have each traced his aspirations, his deeds, and finally his characteristic sign manual to attest his good faith or his reckless defiance. The women, too, have sketched many a touch-

ing paragraph in this curious history. The pansies they lovingly tended so long ago are now found blowing in waste places, dwindled to mere specks of purple and yellow, hardy yet pathetic descendants of a royal ancestry. Nor should it be offensive to remark that somehow the Creoles themselves seem more beholden to the past than to the present for a certain fine charm of spirit and manner. There is, indeed, a medieval bouquet haunting the air in the vicinity of every French cottage in the warm low country. Time works a truly artistic deception by touching with lines of age the roof and walls, the rude fences, and the rickety scuppernong arbors. Surely, you will think, this place, with its gnarled fig-trees and its moss-tapestried orange-orchard, dates back into the days of chain-armor and carven crossbows. It would hardly surprise one to see Friar Tuck fill up the cabin's low front door with his massive body and genially truculent face.

The little lady who presides in the Winter Garden has a theory assuming that what-

ever is old is precious, and that whatever is faded, discolored, moldy, or dilapidated is old. She it is who has enriched the library with dog-eared French volumes from the second-hand book-stores in a street named Royal, but smelling distinctly plebeian. Thence, too, she fetches Venetian bottles and glasses, squat brass candlesticks, and grim little claw-footed tables to match an Empire desk of the same smoky mahogany, much patched and re-glued. Like a busy, self-satisfied bird building a nest out of faded shreds of last year's autumn leaves and bark with a few bits of snake-skin and two or three bright feathers, she has woven a charm against the rough walls and above the gaping fireplace. Such is the magnetic allurement of this shelved and book-dusty and archaic den that when a norther comes, giving practical excuse for a pile of burning logs on the hearth, a steaming kettle on the crane, and a semicircle of complacent sitters in the glow, we all forget our low-country environment, and behave as true Northerners, one of us reading aloud, the rest listening, not

more to the literary mouthing than to the loud boom of wind in the chimney-top. Strangely distinct at intervals, cutting sharply, yet not shrilly, down through night's tumult, comes the cry of a wandering sea-fowl from far aloft, where bird and storm-cloud career wing and wing against a dusky sky. It is an hour for one of those ample romances written before the ink-pots of genius, running dry of magic fluid, were refilled with a gross solution of raw realism. Come, Ivanhoe, come, D'Artagnan, come, any hero of the mighty ages, and make us forget the story of debauching innuendo and ill-favored love. Better coarse deeds of arms than flabby and unsound domestic morals set in a frame of unholy suggestion.

On the very next morning after the night of storm a twittering of small birds in the mossy tangles round about calls up the sun from a swaying sea, out of which he flares gloriously, like a tremendous fire-lily blossoming against the sky. It is well worth the effort to rise early and see this. Moreover, the oyster fleet goes out be-

times, a straggling line of bellying sails drawing away with the stately grace of wild fowl, each smack trailing behind it a tow-line at the end of which bobs a dark little boat wherefrom the oystermen will let down their tongs to grapple the shells in the muddy sea-floor. A twinge of chilliness, a nipping edge on the air, suggests frost; but there is none. All this shivering does no more than brace one's appetite for breakfast—that fragrant morning function of our fat black cook, who speaks gumbo French, and brews a coffee delightful beyond praise. If you are educated to the altitude of taste which brooks a Bordelais steak piping hot and overtopped with onion, garlic, red pepper, and bacon-drip, move lively when the bell rings, or you may have but a savory and fragrant bone to pick for your share, which would be a notable loss in our climate, where trencher delights seem more vivid than in colder surroundings.

Speaking of mensal attractions, a part of our garden, lying far in the rear, is given over to an Italian master who knows

all the secrets of vegetable-growing. With a short-handled hoe he goes about, digging industriously around the roots of things, his back arched like a furious cat's, his nose almost touching the ground. It is he who brings in the great heads of cauliflower, the young red radishes, the silver-tipped onion-shoots, the spinach, the crisp lettuce, the bur-artichokes, and the strawberries. Everything, indeed, which can be coaxed or forced to grow into edible bulb, leaf, stalk, flower, or fruit he wrestles with. All sorts of phosphates, cotton-seed meal, bone-dust, leaf-mold, and swamp-muck are lavished to fertilize the sand withal. He feeds his plants as if they were his children, talking to them in a queer monotone while pruning, weeding, and watering them. It is from his area of cultivation that comes all this pungency which now and again loads the air. A whiff of garlic even strays into the flower-plats, and makes an inartistic foil for the perfume of rose and the aroma of acacia.

Our neighbors, scattered hither and yon in the vast pine wood, come and go along

the white sand-paths leading from house to house amid well-kept pear-orchards and dusky fig-clumps. They nearly all have the Latin volatility we expect in Creoles, singing on their way, not unfrequently with a joyous timbre and a bird-like carelessness in their voices. The young girls are sweet, after a fashion, and the youths have a certain debonair cast of face and a lightness of bearing which somehow cannot be quite reconciled with the main features of their decidedly limited lives. A few, better to do than the rest, are educated, have been to Paris for some years of school and gaiety; but even they bear about them a something like a drapery of the long ago—their personal atmosphere attending them always, giving a very romantic effect of hazy distance and dim perspective.

In looking over our garden paling at the little world abutting us, we witness many things which impress our lives with memorable light sketches. These delicious people—the phrase comes nearest the true description—these delicious

people are not only lovable, but they love. Nowhere else, probably, does the thought of marriage so insistently betray itself in man and maid; wherefore we naturally take a silent part in many a pretty little romance. Love-passages so simple and sincere that they scarcely seem a part of real life, iridescent bubbles of frank passion we might call them, shining a moment in this Southern sunlight, then bursting to nothingness with a twitter of girlish laughter and the half-sullen yet always flippant jocundity of a baffled boy, are frequent as the billing of birds. But coquetry finally yields to such seriousness as matrimony demands, and the bell of our village church is kept busy ringing for weddings. Nor does this lavish marrying, with its swift and generous result in progeny, bring appreciable hardships to the daring twain, who usually have but their love and two pairs of somewhat indolent hands for means of livelihood. Nature takes care of her own in the low country, where life can flaunt a gorgeous banner of luxury on no capital beyond a mullet-net, a

potato-patch, and some pigs in a pen. We have a neighbor who congratulates himself as a man of substance, having a wife and eleven children, the eldest not yet eighteen. His estate consists of a little sandy plat of ten acres, with a cabin in the middle. He has six large pecan-trees, three fig-trees, a scuppernong-vine, a dozen pear-trees, an acre of cabbages, potatoes, and carrots, a horse, two cows, and six pigs. Ah, but he rubs his hands together to relieve his oppressive sense of prosperity!

After a few spiteful flurries, winter in our low country lays aside all make-believe of frost and bleakness. The weather-god puffs his sunburnt jowls and blows a flute of spring. All around in haw and yaupon the mocking-birds begin to show signs of vernal lustiness. Here and there one tries a bar of his love-tune, which sounds as if the notes, although as liquid as water, clogged his syrinx. A sparkling twitter soon follows, however, and then the rapture of May fills the February hedges and orchards. Thrush and blue-bird join in, a vireo wanders by, the voices

of jay and woodpecker take on a soft and tender shade of meaning, the delicate innuendo of resurgent love suiting absolutely the mood apparent in sky, sea, boscage, and air. To-morrow we may hear the dropping-song, that wonderful ecstasy of the mocking-bird's love.

In this land of leisure there is no hurrying through the season of nest-building and melody. The birds devote two or three weeks to sketching in the careless foundation of twigs upon which will some time rest the cleverly woven cup of avian domestic bliss; meantime they wander, the cock singing passionately, the demure little hen coquetting with every ball of animated feathers in sight. It all comes to a brisk and harmless fight between jealous males here and there. The war-cries ring fiercely at intervals, and out of prickly thickets rush the combatants, clashing their wings together, and mayhap losing a bright feather or two. One would think they had just returned from a peace congress, were their battles a trifle more viciously stubborn.

Spring extends from the middle of January to an indefinite point, which sometimes touches June. Day after day the temperature is monotonously even; night after night a wonderful sky, profoundly deep between its stars, loops a dusky blend of Milky Way and empyrean over the warm sea and wavering islands. All of the most interesting plants, shrubs, vines, trees in our Garden now rise to the highest achievement and spread abroad such bewildering splendors of leaf, spike, bud, flower, and painted stalk as only the favored spots of earth ever yield. Rich colors seem to imbue every natural object, vegetable and animal; even the snakes in the grass, basking or gliding, betray their kinship with the birds by a fine glow on their variegated scales. Doubtless the master serpent himself, who tempted the mistress of Eden, is lurking somewhere in my domain, a gorgeously pied skin of fire-opals mailing his back, and a dazing fascination in his eyes. But let him shine; I am not an ophiologist.

With spring arrive the crab, the floun-

der, and the pompano, a trio of luscious significance. Perhaps the allusion just made to Satan in his first form has led directly to deviled crab; but the soft-shelled little backsliders, the earliest caught, we do not devil; they are fried brown, while the fish are broiled and buttered to nestle in a greenery of cress—a bouquet more influential with a hungry man than a queen's vase of roses! Still, we never desert the banner of Flora in a garden land. Not only roses, but pots foaming high with magnificent wild violets, from a distant glade, sweeten the morning's board, and reflect soft hues upon the plates round about. Indeed, violet-hunting is one of our recreations. It goes along with bird-study and sylvan archery, a sort of decorative interlude flashing blue as the sky between science and sport. Certain spaces in the pine forest, open to the sun, are fairly painted with these large odorless violets, the stems of which are sometimes almost a foot tall. We gather lupines, too; and in a few marshy plots the glorious flowers of iris and pitcher-plant

gleam in scattered array, the latter showing both a yellow and a purple species. Along the swales, where little half-hidden streams trickle darkling among the roots of magnolia and sweet-gum, we find gay fringes of azalea, with dogwood-trees spreading above them wide sprays of bloom as white as snow.

But all play and no work would be too great a stress of luxury, even in the low country. I have found literary labor far more easy and satisfactory here than in a higher latitude. By shifting my home so as to be throughout the year virtually within the periphery of summer, I am able to have, almost every day, my full measure of outdoor exercise and free access to the solitude of wild nature. To the sedentary craftsman this means a great deal, in both recreation of mind and refreshment of body. What is food for one may be poison for another; but there is a general rule, a law of biology, which cannot be dodged by any of us—the law known to the fowls of the air and the beasts of the field; namely, that life de-

pends upon waste and renewal. He who labors with the brain wastes vitality without stint; he sows with the sack; and he must renew his fund of energy just as generously and frequently as he gives it out. This he cannot do in a boreal climate. Bitter cold weather is mightily stimulating to him who habitually lives out in it; but the desk-man, the sedentary artist, must work in a warm air. During our Northern winter our libraries and studios are necessarily superheated; therefore, when we go forth from their atmosphere directly into air forty degrees below freezing temperature, the change is too sudden and extreme for recreational effect. Nor can any degree of precaution reduce the risk to the line of safety. Nature has not built us for such violent strains upon our most delicate organs—the eyes, ears, nose, throat, bronchial tubes, and lungs. Not only does the atrocious cold immediately affect these organs when suddenly applied to them while they are attempered to suit a furnace-heated atmosphere, but it paralyzes every pore of the skin, and

thrusts back into the blood a load of waste tissue.

In my Winter Garden we have no such plunges from heat to cold. During the chillest weather I write by an open fire, and when I fling aside the pen for the bow or the fishing-rod, the change from the atmosphere of the study to the open air is but a sweetly tonic experience, which goes through my brain like a gust of song. No swaddling in furs, no gasping, no icy inhalations, no numbing feet or fleece-gloved hands; we hold our shoulders back and breathe as if the draught were something to make one greedy beyond reserve.

Doubtless the Southern summer added to the Southern winter would enervate us; but the birds found out eons ago that a swinging life, alternating summer in a high latitude with winter in the warm South, afforded just the climatic influences necessary to perfect health. I have studied wild birds with persistence and with every facility at hand, in all seasons and under all conditions, between Canada and the islands of the Gulf of Mexico; but I never

yet knew of one that died of old age, never killed one that, when dissected, appeared in the least affected with senile decay. I do not say that birds never die of old age —domesticated birds certainly do; and it may be all right for men of science to make eyes at me when I do roundly deny the existence of any evidence, worth serious attention, tending to prove that wild birds, in their natural habitat, with plenty of their natural food to eat, ever die, save when stricken by disease or accident.

Breaking away from a fascinating question like this of bird immortality—a question to which I am bound sometime to return with plenty of facts to uphold my theory—reminds me that the time for northward migration is at hand. This morning there was a redoubled clamor of voices circulating through the garden tree-tops, and a fresh rustle of wings round about. I awoke with a longing softly astir in my blood, while in my nostrils the far-off spring fragrance of the Wabash country and of the banks of Rock River made me understand that winter was no more. A

tide of migrating birds had overlapped my garden at sunrise, and was flowing on, tumultuously vocal, toward the land of blue-grass, vast fertile farms, and blooming apple-orchards.

At breakfast some one of the circle hints a desire to feel a brisk waft of Hoosier air off the Wea plains, and I venture a remark or two upon the fine spring weather reported from the Indianapolis station. As if through leagues upon leagues of golden haze, I see the hyacinths purpling a slope at Sherwood Place. Like the mere trickle of water which pierces a Mississippi levee, our desultory mouthing grows firmer and stronger all in one direction, until presently it fairly roars, sweeping away every remnant of a barrier; and before we comprehend fully what possesses us, lo! we are packing our bags and trunks, actually trembling meantime, and breathless with delight at thought of flying northward. An intoxicating sense of moving apace with one of the ancient universal impulses fills us during our passage over mountain and valley; for by day we see the song-

birds on either side of us, and at night, high above us, the wild geese honk assuringly, heading for the Tippecanoe and the Kankakee. In Alabama we see the foothills of Sand Mountain blotched pink and blue with flowers not known to the lowlanders. Farmers are planting corn in Tennessee. We rush across Kentucky by night, and when the sunshine again falls into our swaying berth we look out upon apple-orchards fair with bloom reeling past us as if hurrying into the vast dream-country from which we are so joyously taking our farewell flight. And far behind us we hear a soft, melodious stroke, the gate of my Winter Garden closing to shut in our abandoned dreams.

Paradise Circle

FROM the Winter Garden going westward, after a brisk walk of nearly an hour you come by way of a dim trail into a little glade where tall wood-sedge grows in scattered wisps. The space is surrounded by an irregular hedge of wild yaupon-bushes, dogwood-clumps, fringe-trees, and pines, save where a slow and slight runnel passes tangent to the periphery, adding the dense green plants and trees of its miry bank. Three bow-shots distant from this spot, still westward, a marsh begins, covered with low rushes and tufts of coarse grass, stretching away for miles, a plain visibly broken only by the straggling live-oaks and water-oaks marking the line of a considerable bayou. I have named the glade Paradise Circle, on no partic-

ular principle. It is a bird-theater, where comedies, tragedies, farces, and "varieties" are mixed together with song attended by discordant bickerings. I usually reach it early in the morning, of spring days, dallying there awhile before passing forth upon the marsh for a shooting-bout with myself.

I wonder, and yet do not so greatly care, what the sportsman with the gun thinks of me and my method of sport. Like all isolated men, I am a trifle self-conscious. My bow and my book further enforce the influence of radical departure from the prevailing—I might say the universal—modern way of manly recreation by field and flood. But what of it? Why should not I get my physical exercise and mental refreshment as well with my bow and my book as yonder gentleman with his gun and his dog? Perhaps the very fact that I offer to myself this question presupposes that I am somewhat uneasy about my standing. Granted. The bird is uneasy on the bough; the hare feels an endless insecurity; all wild things start and flit,

keep up a strange watchfulness; they know, somehow, that the decision is against them.

When I lean my unstrung bow against a blooming wild haw-bush, hang my quiver beside it, and seat myself to read, there is a composite impression of aloofness, wide separation from mankind, and remoteness from things modern and conventional. Yet I am disturbed not unpleasantly, still profoundly and, strangely, by a sense of helplessness and danger, which, when analyzed, turns out to be a remote consciousness that this life I so enjoy is really the forbidden life, the life long since abolished. I am dreaming, and I fear the awakening—I am playing, and I dread the call to work!

A tenuous delight spreads wine-like in one's veins at the first genuine touch of solitude; and let me tell you that a bow has a virtue in it which you feel slip along your nerves to stir your imagination, especially when the bow is a fine old yew, richly colored in grain and fiber by long use, and stands so near you that your elbow may fondle it while you read Chau-

cer and hear the thrushes and mocking-birds song-rollicking far and near. Indeed, the bow is, to a wild, bird-haunted spot like Paradise Circle, what sugar is to a mint-julep—a thing to qualify and at the same time authenticate essential originalities. Man made one ingredient of julep, nature brewed the other in the stems and leaves of mint; sugar does the rest. My bow connects bird-song with Chaucer-song. I read Chaucer and hear the wild twittering in bush and brake, while the presence of the old yew and its quiver of shafts somehow sweetens and deliciously tempers both, blending them to suit my very deepest taste.

You smile doubtingly, as many a good and true skeptic has done before you; but pray be practical and try it. Get you a fairly good six-foot bow and a quiver of arrows; be ashamed of them in all frankness; feel like a great, unmanly fool while sneaking away to the woods with them; but go on, and be unspeakably relieved when once you are in the solitude of nature, hidden from men by green thickets and

unfrequented groves. Now handle your tackle a little, looking all around you, as a wild turkey habitually does, to see if by any possible ill luck a human eye is within range. It is a crucial moment for you. If a man should step from behind a tree near by, you would drop your bow and run like a hare, recklessly heeling and toeing your way through copse and tangle, across brook and over fell, never stopping while breath and nerve lasted. In a little space of time, however, if nothing break the charm of solitude, you will begin to realize a fascination that never yet has failed, and presently the bow will have you completely at its mercy. Practise with it a few minutes every day for a week, and your fate will be sealed; never again can you quite escape from the purple mist, the romantic allurement, the picturesque hallucination of archery. Fly-fishing, cricket, fencing, skating, polo, and golf all condensed into one cannot compare with it.

But the proof is not in words. What one says must have under it the lift of

something done. A limpkin crying in the rushes called me away from Chaucer; for it had been down in my book of memoranda all winter that a limpkin I must have to complete a study, yet so far the bird had eluded me. To loop my quiver on my belt, brace my bow, and set off across the marsh was a trick in three motions, done with the ease and certainty of absolute habit. Self-consciousness departs when unhindered enthusiasm arrives. I could not see the bird, but my imagination pierced the rushes and made out every detail of form and feather. Expectation braced all my bow-shooting muscles and nerves. It is invariably a fresh delight to the sylvan archer when an opportunity for a shot seems about to come.

When I broke through the rim of Paradise Circle to enter the marsh a woodcock flew up at my toes and sped sharply around a thorny bush—too sharply, indeed, for it was caught in an extended spray of spikes and held there fluttering a moment; then it dropped almost straight to the ground, where it ran a little way and hid

under the grass and leaves. At the same moment out of the corner of an eye I saw five plover drop lightly upon a patch of green marsh, where the grass had lately been burnt off and renewed. Embarrassment of riches! Not often does the archer thus find his fortunes clashing so merrily one against another. And the limpkin continued to cry at intervals right in the center of a mere patch—scarcely more than an armful—of rushes not sixty yards away. From where I was the plover could be reached by a long shot, and the whole wisp was huddled within a circle three feet across; but the woodcock lay under light cover at half the distance.

Chaucer's heady wine may have overstimulated my mind; at all events, a greedy desire to bag every bird—woodcock, plover, limpkin—mastered me, and the plan of campaign was instantaneously formed. First come, first served. The woodcock had the floor; I would give him honorable notice, to begin with, for which I selected a heavy, blunt, broad-feathered arrow suited to short range; then I crept

like a cat toward my quarry, bending my gaze hard upon the spot where I had seen it hide. You must bear in mind that the sylvan archer is forced to depend upon keenness of vision, stealth, knowledge of bird-habits, and all that sort of thing, to an extent rarely thought of by the sportsman with a gun. I have killed many birds on the wing, birds both large and small, slow-fliers and air-splitters, with my archery tackle; but of course there is little certainty in such shooting. Moreover, the long flight of an arrow delivered at a considerable elevation is an item to consider; too often it means loss of the missile. Long ago I used to practise on meadow-larks in our Western clover-fields, and I considered myself expert when I could count upon one bird in fifteen shots! Of course, I reformed presently, and left the beautiful starlings to their singing all unmolested.

But now the woodcock, which to discover in its hiding-place, and have a shot at while it crouched on the ground, would be a feat far superior to flushing it and shooting it on the wing with a shot-gun.

Give the bird a chance, say the gun-bearers. Well, the archer gives it ten chances at the very least. In the first place, there is the well-nigh impossible task of seeing a quail, a woodcock, a snipe, or any other hiding bird before it rises, while it is usually quite easy to make it fly up so that an ounce or more of shot may be whirled at it. Then, after the archer has cleverly spied out his game, almost undistinguishable amid the grass and leaves, what a thin chance he has to bag it!

In the present case I did not succeed, so far as discovery went. A long and patient scrutiny of the spot where the woodcock lay hiding gave not a glimpse of feather or beak; and when at last my foot slipped in the slightest way, crushing a dry weed with a snap, up sprang the shining brown bird, squeaking keenly, its strong wings purring like silk banners blown by a fresh wind. What followed was a rare accident or a marvelous shot. I prefer the latter solution. Nor was I without a witness to my skill. At fifteen

paces, just as the woodcock turned in air, perhaps twelve feet above ground, I stopped him with my heavy arrow, a center hit, bringing him down in such style that a great self-satisfaction went over me like a wave. A thing like that is not frequently done, even by the best archer, and in my exceeding deep delight I did not hear the horseman come from under the hedge of Paradise Circle. When he spoke I turned about startled, doubtless glaring.

"Ouf, zah! varee good you chutes zat vay, zah."

He reined in his Creole pony, lifted his hat, and bowed. I saw in his thin, clear-cut face a frank expression of mingled wonder and vast regard. Across the horn of his saddle slanted an elegantly modeled and finished hammerless double-barrel. I returned his salute, and went to retrieve my bird.

"Admirable, zah, admirable!" he called after me, giving a purely French pronunciation and accent to the adjective.

Very likely he was not pleased when, after I had laid hands on my game and

the arrow that had behaved so famously, I walked away without looking back. Your archer, a lonely and selfish churl, makes no acquaintances in the field or the wood. He has learned his lesson, one important chapter of which teaches that any man or any boy of whatever breed will follow the bow and worry the bowman with breathless remarks and difficult questions. Many a time have I had at my heels, upon setting out for the woods from a village, a mob of curious, nay, fascinated louts, of all sizes and habiliments; nor would they accept mere coldness or lofty inattention as sufficient rebuff to turn them back. Even a decided scowl only checked them and kept them at a certain distance, from which they cast upon me longing glances and prophetic remarks.

"Bet ye he 's half Injen," said one lop-hatted lad that I remember very well, "an' I 'spec' he kin hit a rabbit every time."

"Don't yer b'lieve it," spoke up another. "He 's not airy Injen; he 's er wil' man got away f'om er show!"

A very sensitive person winces under

such criticism. Indeed, a frequent recurrence of it leads to desperation. Lately I have adopted the ruse of carrying my bow and quiver each in a thin rubber bag when I go forth for a tramp. This generally enables me to avoid exciting people beyond the bounds of politeness. Still some of them scent a mystery through the bags, and venture to ask embarrassing questions.

I got rid of my polite Creole cavalier very easily, I thought, and went for a shot at the five plover, which were feeding busily on the verdant plat. They began to suspect me, so that I had to risk a shaft over a long range with a cross wind. Of course I missed.

"Nevah heet eem, zah; but he haf to be gittin' roun' f'om zat—zat—zat *flèche* w'at 'oo chute at eem!"

I turned quickly, and there he was, pony and all, fifteen feet to the rear, smiling with gentle approval upon my good yew bow. It is unnecessary to record that I did not fare better with the rare limpkin when its turn came. The horseman followed at my heels, sweetly remarking upon

my taste in preferring savage weapons to the far more effective engine of contemporary civilization resting idle on his saddle-horn. I tried a wing-shot in sheer bravado when my bird, frightened by the splashing of the horse's feet in a puddle, rose with a great show of mottled pinions; but my shaft went absurdly wide of the mark. Then the Creole laughed ironically, and galloped away, flinging back over his sloping shoulder a patois phrase that meant in English, "Such tomfoolery for a grown man!" And yet that same cavalier would have thought it not in the least tomfoolery to play poker all night long and find himself seven dollars and forty cents loser at sunrise. It is all owing to the slant of a man's vision as to what he recognizes, when in a critical mood, as worthy of manly attention.

I breathed freely once more when the debonair little Creole passed out of sight, riding through the wood beyond Paradise Circle, leaving me alone knee-deep in the stiff marsh-grass. A rail clucking under a broad drift of fallen rushes at the middle

of a place too boggy for my weight gave me some trouble before I would acknowledge its inaccessibility. I had lost an arrow by shooting at the limpkin, and as but four remained in my quiver, I did not purpose to risk another foolishly or carelessly. The rail seemed to understand my predicament. It walked boldly forth from cover and shook its short tail at me, as if to suggest what a fine target I was deprived of by circumstances over which I had no control; nor did it skulk, after its usual fashion, or fly, when I tried to drive it out of its queachy territory; but there it stood, doddling its head, one foot gripping a stiff straw of water-grass, the other spread upon a spatter-dock leaf.

Of course, it was a small matter, at which one may look back indifferently; but just then it seemed to me the most vexatious thing imaginable that a rail, sleek, sheeny, fat, should stand before me, not twenty yards distant, and fairly nag at my bow, while I capered impotently around the margin of that bottomless loblolly! A sharp, rattling cry, not in the least timidly

uttered, seemed to pry the bird's stout beak open and shake every feather on its back. This was repeated at irregular intervals. Meantime my desire to shoot increased, in some sort of uncontrollable ratio, until it became an ecstatic frenzy. I had an arrow across my bow and nocked on the string. I took aim at half-draw, but withheld the shot. I knew that I could hit the saucy and atrociously daring thing; but I could not afford to lose an arrow; and besides, what good would the rail do me if I did kill it? There it would be in the middle of the mud-pond, and—But I could bear it no longer. Just one arrow—what did I care? So I braced myself and drew. Slowly the shaft slipped across my bending bow until the feather reached a point below my chin, and in a line with my right eye, while the metal head touched my left forefinger-knuckle.

Then the shot. It was beautiful and true—but not a hit; only a whack in the mud, and a spattering of it all around where the arrow entered with a dull, half-liquid chug about five inches to the left of

the bird, which did not fly or run, but simply dodged, shrank, and looked surprised.

That was really no unusual thing for a bird to do. When a shaft passes near one the sound of the feather seems to make it rather afraid to move. Even a wild turkey will sometimes spread its wings and squat flat on the ground as the whir of a shaft passing close confuses and frightens it. And now I was beyond self-control. Out came another arrow, which was shot with similar effect; then another, and so on until my quiver was empty. Yet there stood, or rather crouched, the beautiful rail, quite untouched. My missiles were planted close to him in an irregular ring, each one buried almost to its feather in the mud; and I stood helpless, with sagging jaw, until presently, recovering my rage, I yelled at the bird so savagely and hoarsely that it sprang into the air and flew away in a straight line across the wide marsh, its wings working wildly, until it dropped, a quarter of a mile distant, into another mud-pond.

I unbraced my bow, and after one longing look at the feather-ends of my arrows slanting out of the bog, I turned me toward Paradise Circle again. Would you believe me if I should tell you that I had not walked forty steps when up flew a great blue heron out of a little tide-ditch but a few feet from me? So it was; and then the birds of marsh and thicket and wood began to show themselves here, yonder, everywhere. They whirled in air; they stretched long necks out of the grass and rushes; they ran on the verdant plats; they uttered guttural croaks, squawked raspingly, chattered, twittered, sang far and near. Had my quiver been full of arrows I could have shot to left, right, front, rear, with choice of birds for target. But I soon lost every trace of impatience and regret; for your sylvan bowman really likes better to revel among birds than to shoot the rarest of them, even for ornithology's sake.

When I again entered Paradise Circle the sun was going down the western slope of heaven into a tender haze through which its light came slantwise, touching the tree-

tops with dream-glories, shimmering softly through the haw-blossom sprays,—a haunting effect,—and the mocking-birds dashed their sparkling fife-music over and under and through it all. I sat down beneath a liquid amber-tree to nurse my bow and absorb the immanent sweets of bloom, honey-dew, bursting buds, and that wandering, elusive something we recognize as woodsy freshness.

A greenlet came to eye me curiously from a tuft of young leaves, while it did some gymnastics, swinging back-downward, balancing its lithe body cleverly in various poses, curving its neck around a twig and peeping sharply under the hidden parts of sprays. Other little insect-hunters were on high in the greater trees, going back and forth through the foliage like shuttles from the hand of an unsteady weaver. And then a flash of vivid red—it was as if a smith had swung a bit of ruby-hot metal from bush to bush—introduced a cardinal grosbeak in full plumage. I started as one does who feels a shock of sudden and unexpected delight. Here

was a torch for memory, a flash from home—that other home in the far North, where soon the maples would be in leaf, the apple-trees abloom, and where all the woods and fields, fragrant as a thyme-bed, would be ringing with bird-song. The cardinal grosbeak lives there the year round; but there are migrants who swing back and forth with the sun. Why do some remain in the frozen North while their companions flit away into the lands of perpetual summer? But then, why does the same problem of migration constantly arise in human history? Many of my friends laugh at me for shrinking down the southern slope of the world while they go blithely about to furbish up their sleighs and skates.

Seeing the cardinal grosbeak gave me a nostalgia; indeed, it transported me, so to say, back to the sleety thickets of Indiana, where I last saw this fine fellow. And what a splendid bird he is! From crest to toe-tip he shines, nay, he dazzles one's eyes; and he feels quite largely the importance of his color. I cannot think of him

save as an avian firebrand, burning almost fiercely in our Western winter, and singing at a major pitch whenever a hint of spring hovers in the air.

I speak of the grosbeak as masculine; but the feminine is at hand, inconspicuously brownish gray with a faint wash of cardinal. The pair do not, in winter, keep close company with each other; yet where the blazing cock fidgets and flits, not very far away his honest hen peers and pecks, a very industrious little body, proud of her lord. Songless what time the sun is bobbing along the southern slope of heaven, the cardinal grosbeak is yet not voiceless. Approach too near the hedge or thicket in which he flickers like the blaze of a red lantern, and he warns you with a "Chip, chip!" not to trespass, lifting his pointed crest the while. Should you get hold of him, a thing about as difficult to do as reaching a star, he would bite you cruelly with mandibles snapping like the jaws of a tiny steel trap.

Of all the resident Northern birds, the blue jay and the cardinal grosbeak are

most brilliantly beautiful, the golden-winged woodpecker coming close up as third in the list. But conspicuous as the grosbeak is, a large majority of casual observers do not really know him when they see him. A red bird they bear in mind in a general way, not distinguishing the cardinal grosbeak from the summer tanager, or, for that matter, from any other of the red-dashed *Tanagridæ*, to which the grosbeaks are not at all closely related. There is a striking resemblance in mere form between the cardinal and the blue jay. Each has a short, somewhat stoutish body, a long tail, a tall crest, and a short, stout bill. But the cardinal grosbeak shows a less cruel disposition toward other feathered beings, and seems to be in every way a more lovable bird.

In making studies which have extended over a large area, I have found very little change of habit in this grosbeak on account of differences of locality and climate. There is a slight variation in color when the bird is resident in the far Southwest, the red becoming brighter and purer, with

less tendency to shade into gray or brown. While our Northern variety has a dash of jet-black in his face surrounding his red bill, the fiery crest of his California and Texas brother sometimes almost burns out this soot, leaving but traces of it on the cheeks and under the chin. Everywhere, however, I see him haunting the same sort of places: low underbrush, hillside thickets, vine-tangles, ravines grown up with bushes—a happy, courageous fellow, always busy, and in springtime exceedingly noisy when he mounts to the highest tip of a tree and whistles his far-reaching, breezy call, which sounds like "Wheecheer! wheecheer! wheecheer! Wheet!" It is the very boldest phrase heard in all our woods, sometimes changing to "Hoitee! hoitee! hoitee! Hoit! hoit! hoit!" often repeated.

Dr. Coues and other ornithologists report the cardinal grosbeak as a very shy bird. I have not been able to confirm this. Pairs of these lovely birds haunt the trees and shrubbery of the garden around my Indiana home, often lingering near my study windows, even playing in a

muscadine-vine which drapes the veranda. From the shores of Okeechobee and the brakes of Louisiana to middle Indiana I have found it common and resident, not shyer than the blue jay or the brown thrush, living on fair terms with the cat-bird and the towhee bunting. In times of deep and long-continued snow, I often place cracked nuts and broken bread of corn-meal on the window-sills of my study in order to give the birds something to live on. Cardinal grosbeaks, blue jays, two or three species of woodpecker, and the crested titmouse soon find the feast, and are not backward about accepting its comfort. The grosbeak eats voraciously upon such an occasion, apparently more pressed by hunger than the other birds, and I suspect that our midwinter is often very hard on him; but my residence in the South at that season has interfered with observation.

The rose-breasted grosbeak is not resident, but when he comes up from the far South in spring he is like a torch in our woods. These splendid creatures are be-

coming quite scarce. A few years ago they were plentiful in many places. I have seen them migrating southward in scattering flocks during the last days of August and the first week of September. The present year I saw none. This grosbeak is but a cousin of the cardinal's; and the same may be said of the beautiful blue grosbeak, now so seldom seen. But, getting back to our resident redcoat, the cardinal itself is rapidly disappearing from the middle Western States. A few years more will, it is to be feared, confine its habitat to the wilder regions of the South.

The grosbeak blazing so conspicuously in the hedge of Paradise Circle was the first that I had ever seen there. If he had a mate she kept out of my sight. Probably he was in search of her, for he mounted to the topmost spray of a fringe-bush and called loudly in a clear, ringing voice supremely cheerful and insistent. But no answer came; a foraging hawk may have had a good meal picking the bones of Madam Grosbeak.

Speaking of hawks, they play a leading

part in the tragedy of avian life. My notes of observation have abundant references to hairbreadth escapes, bloody murders, sudden swoopings, and desperate struggles, with these cruel birds as centers of force and action. Wherever I have walked in wood and field the hawk has come upon the scene, a beautiful and terrible apparition. He was the devil in Paradise Circle, and one morning I did unto him somewhat as he was in the habit of doing unto others. He fell upon a quail that I had been stalking; and it exasperated me to see him use his own body as a missile with truer aim than I could compass over my tackle. Indeed, he raped the game boldly from its hiding-place right under my gaze, when I was preparing to shoot; and before he could rise with it I bowled him over, the thief!

Ah, if I were but gifted, if I could surprise the secret of genius, so that what I know about birds, what I have seen them do, what songs and cries and rapturous gurglings I have heard from them, could be spilled out of my pen, an ink of mag-

netic power to illuminate my pages withal, I would write you a bird-book. It is the old fascination, the gnawing desire to impart the thrills that one has felt. I do not feel lonely when I realize the barrier set around my ambition. Who was it of old that felt a mystery descend from the "way of an eagle in the air"? Dull indeed must be the imagination into which a May morning's twittering voices have not left a delightful *cacoëthes scribendi*.

From Aristotle down to the charming writers of to-day the bird-note has been a fascinating one in literature, and it probably will never disappear so long as there are green woods and sunny meadows where the gay-winged and sweetly clamorous songsters can have a safe abiding-place. An esthetic instinct of man makes him, even in his most savage state, an admirer of pure colors and tender sounds. Birds and flowers appeal to a sense of both beauty and mystery through perfection of color and form; but birds add two further fascinations—namely, flight and song. I have seen a blue-bird flutter dreamily

through the springtime air, like an animated flower whose sky-tinted petals had become wings (meantime singing that most memorable of all monotonies, now gone forever from our Western country), and it seemed to me a perfect example of an embodied self-singing poem.

But I had in mind bird-literature, not birds themselves; so I must not lose myself in the flood of avian reminiscences which pours around me at the mention of the vanished *Sialia*. Many a sylvan flute was hushed before his. From the leaves torn out of the stone-book we read a strange tale. On those rude pages still linger the sketches of birds extinct eons ago. It was on my pen-nib to add that the writings and drawings of Buffon, Audubon, and Wilson are almost as archaic as those of the quarries. Looking over Audubon's plates the other day, I was shocked to find that they no longer touched my bird-nerve as they once did; and as for Wilson's, what could be flatter or less alive than his portraits of my favorite songsters?

Turning from pictures to literature, we

fare better, in a way. White of Selborne has not been surpassed as a gossiper about nature; his book, being on the level plane of truth, yet saturated with a late-lingering and beautiful ignorance,—note his child-like faith in the hibernation of swallows,—will always catch the attention of imaginative readers. For what is more interesting than simplicity, sincerity, and freshness, as they blend in White's letters? Wilson and Audubon make the same claim upon us, but in a different way, with their writings. How we envy them their golden age of opportunity! Think of American bird-land in their day as compared with what is left for us! Not long ago I was passing over one of the regions described by Wilson as affording him rich materials for his work. I looked in vain for the unbroken woods, the dense cane-brakes, the blooming thickets through which he made his way. Negro farm-hands were plowing the hillsides and valley flats. A few crows and grackles hovered along the fence-rows; here and there a meadow-lark twinkled in the sun; that was all.

These books about birds, this flavor of Thoreau, Burroughs, Seton-Thompson, Dr. Abbott, this fragrant enthusiasm exhaled by the pages of Mrs. Miller's and Mr. Bradford Torrey's works,—all this composite message of literature and picture,—what a blessing! For here we have the fadeless tradition. Birds may be sacrificed for the appeasement of the milliner's god; all of our wide country may lose its merry and gaily painted flakes of frolic and feather: but the books are ours forever. Dr. Van Dyke and Charles M. Skinner have bottled up woodsy essences for us which will keep fresh when all the trees have gone to sawdust. The sketches of H. E. Parkhurst, of Colonel Higginson, and of Neltje Blanchan are so steeped in real bird-life that to turn their leaves is like having wings and flitting from grove to grove, trailing behind us the arboreal melodies of thrush and bobolink, with the flowers under us and the sky a turquoise splendor overhead.

Still, I have no time for making catalogues, and a bird-book catalogue should

be a work of art. To borrow from a Kentucky friend and suit his statement to my subject, all bird-books are charming, but some are more so than others. The one great masterpiece has not been written; perhaps it never will be: for the days of unhindered and unstinted luxury by field and flood are gone forever—the book of birds should have been the work of a pioneer. Sometimes I dream that, could I have been with De Soto on his tour from Florida to the Mississippi, I might have left behind me a volume of incomparable interest and value. Yet not a Spaniard of them all did a pen-stroke worth remembering. Think what marvelous wealth of bird-life offered itself to Bienville and his companions all along the Louisiana coast and far up the great river! The Mexican invaders did have a follower who spied upon the tropical birds to an extent just sufficient to be now tantalizing; but think of the wasted opportunity (to gladden a hundred generations) during the palmy days of the Jesuit fathers from Canada to South America! When Ponce

de Leon went looking about in the land of flowers for that magical well-head which was to blacken his gray hairs, renew his teeth, whisk the wrinkles from his face, and revive in his veins an everlasting bubble of joyous vigor, it would have been enough for me could I have trudged apace with him and filled innumerable note-books with sketches and descriptions of all the swarming and clamoring forms in tree-top, thicket, brake, on stream, pond, lily-pad, and floating weed-raft. Fountain of Youth go hang, fabulous gold-mines continue to shimmer in the distance! Give me the wind-song, the bird-song, and the ever fresh surprise of a new flash of color swung across a glade or forest-rift by paroquet or ibis or flamingo.

As it is I must be content, as best I can, to seek the unshorn nooks which may still be found here and yonder, spots like Paradise Circle, where the old fresh spirit of wild nature yet keeps faith with the birds. And if I cannot there write a book, I can read one at will, hearing meantime the same aërial voices that beat upon

Homer's ear and stirred even the realistic heart of Aristotle to keeping time with romance. Chaucer serves me well; likewise old Izaak of the rod and fly; yea, any man's book written under the influence of nature is good to read with solitude and a bow for company, while into my blood steals that subtle sense of freedom, nameless, vague, restful, satisfying, which somehow relates back through generations and civilizations to the remotest, the most primitive Paradise Circle.

Where the Mocking-bird Sings

YOUR sylvan archer must have his lounging days and his days of idle wandering, when, free and easy, quite out of sympathy with his tackle, he seeks after romance as it exists in the haunts of the birds. He cannot be a savage for a great while without feeling satiated. Even the music of his longbow fails to charm him, and he has no taste for its arrow's thrilling diminuendo, or for the stroke of a successful shot.

One thing you may bear in mind, however, to wit, that this same archer, no matter where he lounges or where he wanders, will have his ancient weapons at hand. Cloyed for the time, glad of a change from reality to dreams, he yet, out of habit, keeps in touch with his tackle and

has a corner of an eye trained upon the possibility, remote as it may be, of stumbling against an opportunity for a memorable shot. Even in a hammock he dozes better when the yew and the quiver lie contentedly beside him. The arrow-feathers seem to fan his dreams.

I recall some loiterings with the mocking-birds in the country of the Creoles along our Southern border. Those readers who do not care for poetry may as well pass by this little chapter. What the mocking-bird does is all poetry; and although I do but record unvarnished facts of his history, they somehow, in spite of my stumbling prose, fit themselves together with a melic tunefulness not to be connected with ordinary realities, save by the poet and the sylvan archer.

If there is anything more dreamily romantic than swinging in a hammock on a breezy bluff of our Creole Gulf-coast when the spring weather is fine, it would be worth a good deal to experience it. The wind from the Caribbean region has nothing chilly in it; but it fondles you

with a cooling touch, and passes on into the woods of oak and pine, to send back a half-wintry moan from the dusky foliage. The Gulf-tides are but slight, and the surf is a mere ripple, for there are outlying islands all along, seeming to hang between sea and sky a protecting curtain against outside forces. If the breeze turns about and blows from the land, it comes filtered and purified through leagues of resinous forest. At such a time the fragrances are many, running through all shades from the evanescent balm of liquid amber to the acicular pungence of tar.

All around the mocking-birds sing, and it may be that a negro, with a voice as sweet as a flute's, warbles lazily a stanza in patois which might be from the spring song of Bertrand de Born:

> E platz me quant aug la baudor
> Dels auzels que fan retentir
> Lor cant per lo boscatge, etc.

Indeed, this is the place for reading old ballaeds and chansons; there is a suggestion of five hundred years ago in its en-

vironment. Over yonder in New Orleans, at a second-hand book-stall on Royal Street, you may find mildewed copies of books brought from Paris before the time of Casa Calvo. Some of these show the scholarly temperament and taste of the French Creole of the old days. If you have secured the right one, turn its musty leaves as you swing in the wind, and you can almost hear the lilt of the troubadours. Your entourage is meridional and in a way medieval; there is a fine correspondence between the book and the atmosphere. Actually, the other day two dreamy peasant-looking girls strolled arm-in-arm past me, one of them singing a snatch from Ronsard:

> Mignonne, allons voir si la rose,
> Qui ce matin avoit desclose
> Sa robe de pourpre au soleil,

and so on, as they disappeared amid the low-hanging moss of a live-oak grove.

A Creole mocking-bird took up the gay strain, so it sounded, fitting the spirit of it to an avian mood. I could tell by

the songster's position just where the cabin was to which the girls were going; for these resident mocking-birds hang about the gardens and fig-clumps of the negroes and Creole peasants. They are different from their more enterprising relatives, I have lately discovered, in disposition and singing power, having lost through semi-domestication a certain indescribable sweet *sauvagerie* of manner and voice, the last refinement of the mocking-bird quality in the migrant which comes up from the far South on the first strong flood of spring weather.

It is notable that the resident mocking-birds of the Creole coast seem to prefer the vicinity of a cabin for their nesting-places, and they rarely build near a mansion. The negroes and French peasants usually have a clump of orange-trees, a few gnarled fig-trees, and a rude bower of scuppernong grape-vines, in the midst of which a tiny cot of boards or logs is almost hidden. Here our incomparable songster has found his lotus-land, away from which he will not wander more. He has lost, under the eaves of these lowly

embowered domestic centers, the ancient hereditament of migration and is rapidly degenerating. An easy life and a diet quite different from what the old wandering experience afforded has greatly injured him. Dissection has shown me that while the migrants are always in perfect health the residents are subject to a fatty degeneracy of the vital organs. Evidently this difference is due to the change from a natural and wholesome life to one charged with the evils of semi-domestication.

Some naturalists with whom I have conversed hold to the theory that the resident mocking-birds and the migrant ones are separated by a specific difference in nature not marked by any external badge; but it is plain to my mind that the difference is mere degeneracy of those birds which have, out of sheer laziness, taken up with a life of ease, and to a certain degree debauchery, offered to them by the orchards, vineyards, and berry-patches of mankind.

The resident mocking-birds are marvelous singers, but I have to conclude that

the migrants outdo them at every point. Indeed, you have never found the true mocking-bird strain till you have heard the dropping-song of a genuine wanderer on his way to the nesting-place, or after he has reached it. As a matter of fact, I can say that I believe I have never yet heard a resident mocking-bird sing the dropping-song.

If we could know that before men built homes in our woods the non-migrants lingered around in favored spots, as they do around the farms and orchards now, we might conclude that there is something in a change of scene, climate, and diet to affect bird-life, without attributing the degeneracy of which I have spoken to the influence of the unnatural food and the comparative idleness afforded by a dependence upon man. It cannot be definitely shown, however, that the non-migrant mocking-birds were such before man tempted them and they did eat; for ere the Frenchman came to our Gulf-coast the Indian was there with his house and his plot of cultivated ground.

The land of the mocking-bird is a country where for ages the savages were not too savage to love fruit and corn and succulent vegetables, and to revel in banqueting. The wild men knew where the soil was most fertile, and their imagination led them to beautify many a spot until it was like an earthly paradise. We are told by the old explorers and by subsequent history that some of the Indian farms were charming garden-spots. One chief gave his estate the name White Apple on account of the snowy blooms of his fruit-trees. Such places were Edens wherein our bird was tempted of the devil, and fell. The serpent's name was laziness and unnatural food.

The Southern Indian loved the mocking-bird, and imagined that he paid his sweetheart the most delicate compliment when he compared her to it. I do not know what the original name of our singer was; but I do know that ingenuity could hardly invent an uglier one than mocking-bird. The Creole name, *moqueur*, meaning what ours does, is far more musical. In the

negro patois it is *zozo*, a corruption of *oiseau;* but moqueur is used even in the "gumbo," when the mocking-bird must be particularly distinguished from other small birds. I heard a little negro singing:

> Poc un moqueur, poc un geai,
> Poc un zozo po' l'paté;

which I took to mean:

> Not a mocker, not a jay,
> Not a little bird for a pie.

It is said that a superstition among the Creoles of color keeps them from killing the mocking-bird, which they believe to be a messenger from the happy land. I might place more faith in the story had I not often seen a hulking half-breed returning from the woods with his old blunderbuss on his shoulder, and in his hand a bunch of dead robins and moqueurs. This same blunderbuss is fast destroying the singing-birds of the South, and threatens to rob the dreamy woods of our Creole

coast of all their melody and all their wing-rustle.

But I must not do injustice to the shooters, black or white. The birds—not only the mockers, but nearly all the others as well—are probably doomed to complete or approximate extinction. The man with the gun, or, if you please, with the bow, is not the malefactor that some good souls imagine him to be. He is guilty of sundry depredations, sins against the law of universal bird protection, that he cannot deny; but he may well object to vicarious receptivity when the day of punitive gift-offering comes, and somebody proposes making him the recipient of every other transgressor's share as well as his own.

The boy who shoots with an air-gun or a cheap fowling-piece or an india-rubber sling must take second place in the rank of martyrs. He kills a few little birds and frightens many. He is a nuisance and should be purified; but he gets far more blame than his actual misdemeanors deserve. Then comes the collector of skins and feathers, the man who

supplies museums, private collections, and milliners' shops. He is a bad fellow; he kills for money. Still, his slaughterings, numerous as they certainly are, look insignificant when compared with the enormous decrease of bird-life.

The reports once in a while made out by zoölogical societies and other organizations in the interest of natural-history study are valuable in a way; but one cannot read them without smelling book-dust where the pure air of outdoors ought to be, and feeling that they are based upon scattered and somewhat unreliable details, rather than upon the larger and more generally influential facts of nature and life. This is especially true as regards what has been done in the matter of accounting for the remarkable disappearance of birds from large districts in their natural domain. The gun-bearer, the feather-hunter, and the murderous small boy with the sling are not the main agent of bird destruction, and I wish to give a few items of evidence in this connection.

Game laws for the protection of deer

cannot prevent the complete disappearance of those beautiful animals from a country devoted to modern agriculture. When all the woods are cut down, and all the plains are put to the plow, there is no home left for the bear and the bison. Drain the bogs, and what can the woodcock do for a living? Reclaim all the wet lands, and ditch away the waters of ponds and lakes, but after that look in vain for snipe and duck. Destroy the thickets and briery tangles (they are unsightly and unprofitable on the farm, no matter how necessary they are to the quail), and then look in vain for bevies in the neatly shorn fields. Your bluebirds, that once had the old worm fences with hollow stakes to build in, cannot accept the barbed-wire substitute; where shall their nests be hidden? What are the gay woodpeckers to do when you carefully cut away and burn every dead tree and bough?

Every summer I am more and more curious to know how the meadow-lark survives, how it succeeds in rearing a brood, when year by year the meadows

in which it builds are cut closer and closer by the clanging mowing-machine, and when the seeds it loves are not permitted to ripen. Where do the quail find winter shelter on our highly cultivated and smoothly shorn farms? The food of the wild pigeon is gone, and gone forever are the countless hosts of pigeons. When I was a child the beautiful and magnificent log-cock was everywhere seen in the woods of our country. Now it is rare, save in a few remote wildernesses. Why? Because the rotten wood in which its food is found has been long ago made into heaps and burned by the sturdy men who have caused farms and plantations to supersede the forests.

In the old days of bramble tangles and hazel thickets there were no frozen bevies. Lately I have seen sixteen quails, stiff as icicles, in a pitiful little cluster, where, all unprotected, the zero weather had caught them, as Tennyson has it, in its "frozen palms." Then, the hungry hawks have their will of birds where there is no thick cover for them to hide in, and the farm-

house cats, prowling from field to field and from orchard to orchard, devour every fledgling that they can find. By night the owls hunt with the cats. The farmer's pigs, nosing everywhere, eat up the eggs of all birds that nest on the ground.

It is true that the plume-gatherers have killed thousands of herons; but the farmer's drains—the canals and covered ditches whereby vast areas of watery feeding-grounds have been made dry—have killed millions. Fifty years ago the sloppy prairies and queachy bog-lands of Illinois, Iowa, Indiana, Michigan, and Ohio were the haunts of countless swarms of migrating herons, geese, brant, duck, and crane; now very few are seen, because this intermediate resting- and feeding-ground has been unavailable for years. Even the small herons and bitterns, never much shot, are becoming scarce for the same reason. Hundreds of small streams once in their feeding- and breeding-places are now dry as a bone. Not long ago I visited a spot where formerly the wood-

ducks bred. I found that the wood and the pond had disappeared, and there grew a vast field of corn.

Give wild things the least bit of wilderness, and they will survive in spite of nature and man. The other day a wild-cat attacked a child in one of the oldest settled parts of Indiana. It came out of an unreclaimed ravine on the banks of the Ohio River. I saw a lone log-cock in a considerable wood of the Kankakee region a few years ago. But you cannot save the birds and at the same time starve them, and refuse them both nesting-places and shelter from the cold. Woman's hats and man's guns are hard on birds, but the rustic's utensils are harder on them. Enlightened farming, the making of productive and neatly shorn estates, the march of the plow, the ditching-machine, the underground tile, the patent reaper and mower and thresher, the cats, the owls, the hawks, winter without shelter, summer without food, spring without nesting-places, these are the agencies that are destroying birds by the wholesale. And then, there is the

English sparrow—a murrain seize him! What is left he takes.

Ever since American birds began to be studied the mocking-bird has been a favorite of the descriptive ornithologists. A vast amount of fine writing has been the result, mostly sonorous prose, for, happily, the bird's despicable name has kept him in a large degree exempt from the embalming process known only to the poets. John Lawson fairly began the work; but it was Mark Catesby who, in his "Natural History of Carolina," etc., first opened wide the gate into the region of American bird-song. Alexander Wilson soon followed with his superb achievements; then came Charles Lucien Bonaparte, Thomas Nuttall, and William Swainson. But the crowning work was done by a man of the Creole coast: Audubon gave the mocking-bird a brilliant biography. Before this, however, the great Buffon had romanced at a distance, and by sheer force of style—which in his celebrated address he said "is the man himself"—had come very near describing the dropping-song, which

no one seems really to have noticed before I mentioned it a few years ago.

What for convenience I have called the Creole coast begins at Pensacola, Florida, and ends at the mouth of the Sabine River, between Louisiana and Texas. A leisurely tour in spring from one of these points to the other leads through the paradise of the mocking-birds, so far as the resident ones are concerned; but the area over which the bird is more or less evenly distributed, both as resident and migrant, represents almost a third of our national domain. The lovely hill country around Tallahassee, the regions of Savannah and Charleston, and many favored spots on the peninsula of Florida, are swarming with them. The farther north we go the fewer of them we see until we cross the line of 40° north latitude, where they practically disappear, though straggling adventurers have been reported on the Canadian line and in certain parts of New England. The width of their habitat is from the Atlantic to the Pacific, on a line with our Gulf-coast.

Every spring, for many years, I have studied the mocking-bird in his favorite haunts, and have been upon most intimate terms with his household. The resident bird is so tame that his habits are as open to inspection as are those of any domestic fowl; but quite the contrary is true of the migrant, whose nature seems never to have lost a line of its wildness. Dr. Elliott Coues, in his excellent work, "Key to North American Birds," remarks that the mocking-bird's power of song may be greatly improved by training when in captivity. This is contrary to my observation. The migrant, which is the only genuine *moqueur sauvage*, has a voice incomparably more brilliant and powerful than is ever sent forth from a cage, and there is a great difference between the singing of a free resident bird and that of one reared in captivity—so great, indeed, that I can readily distinguish the superior purity and sweetness of the former, even at a long distance, when both birds are hidden from me. In the region of Bay St. Louis, Mississippi, the cots and cabins of the

negroes are scattered through the pine woods, and each has its one pair, at least, of resident mocking-birds living in the little orchard round about. On the rude veranda you frequently see a bird-cage containing its lonely captive moqueur. In my leisurely rambles I have had the pleasure of hearing captive, resident, and migrant singing at the same time, not two hundred feet apart. There is no mistaking the joyous, triumphant strain of him whose life has been perfected in the broadest freedom of nature. It is the strain of genius, audacious, defiant, untrammeled—a voice of absolute independence crying in the wilderness.

I have never heard the nightingale's song; therefore I have no actual knowledge, from comparative study, upon which to base a decision in the intercontinental dispute as to the world's championship in bird-music; nor does the matter much interest me. What seems to me worth while, however, is the practical test which would naturally come to the question of superiority were the nightingale imported and freed

in our Southern woods. The mocking-bird is a challenger; he loves nothing so much as a song-battle. The brown thrush is the only bird that he has, so far, found willing to take up his gage. I have seen these two rivals, each on the highest point of a tree, dashing melodious noise back and forth for a whole hour without rest. It would be a notable battle were our young republican singer to cross notes with the old hereditary king of song. From all that I can gather, it would be the old story over again: youth, vigor, fearlessness, and absolute freedom would win. I have had correspondence with many distinguished ornithologists of America and of Europe, and have met not a few of them. The almost unanimous opinion among them seems to be that the mocking-bird is the greatest of avian singers—the "arboreal Shakspere," as one has said.

To describe the mocking-bird's song, even as delivered from a cage, is not within the power of any writer. To be understood it must be heard in the solitude of nature, at one of those favored

oases which lie scattered through the Southern forests like islands of bloom in a desert of dusky swamps and funereal moss. Each note is a wonder, each strain a mystery. Here is a bird considerably smaller than a blue jay, delicate, fragile, whose weight will scarcely bend the slenderest twig; but out of its tiny throat leaps a rapturous medley of flute-notes, pure and liquid as spring-water, easily heard a quarter of a mile away! Easily, I say; but in special cases it has been heard much farther. Buffon heard it across nearly four thousand miles of land and sea, and described it with enthusiastic coloring, in the same way that so many of our non-migrant American poets have heard the nightingale distinctly enough to weave his strains into their verse.

In one of my pedestrian tours along the bank of the Jordan,—not the one on whose "stormy banks" the hymn-writer stood to "cast a wishful eye," but the Jordan through which, at its head waters, John A. Murrell rode often in his pursuit of dark deeds,—I lately came upon a spot where

the mocking-birds were holding high revel. The haw-bushes and the yaupon-trees that hedged a little glade were in full greenery, with a flash of white flowers here and there. Under the foliage, by stooping, I could see on one hand the river's sheen, and on the other a flat marsh where some herons were wading with a motion that suggested Japanese art.

With an old pine log for a sofa, I sat at ease a long while, making mental note of the concert, which, without director, and exempt from rhyme and reason, fairly raged in the circular grove. There were some thrushes and one or two warblers doing what they might to be heard, but the mockers had it all their own way; and such a din! It was a *cour d'amour* held by the migrants lately returned from their winter in the tropic region, and they had many and exciting points of love to settle. One fine fellow came and perched near me on a prickly spray of yaupon, where he danced as if the thorns were too sharp for his feet. With wings slightly akimbo, he skipped and hopped and dealt out the

most delicate and all but ludicrous jig-steps in a narrow circle, singing meantime a medley that sparkled with notes and phrases stolen bodily from the songs of other birds.

It was here that, after several seasons of patient watching and disappointment, I witnessed once again in its fullest perfection the performance of the dropping-song, and satisfied myself as to the origin of the ecstasy out of which that strange lyric product is generated. The exhibition opened in this case with a long, singularly pure trill from a bird standing upright with tightly closed wings on a small bushy magnolia-tree. The moment that the voice reached my ear I felt sure that the dropping-song was coming. Something in the strange, appealing richness of the tone foretold a masterpiece of bird-music. I crept to a spot where I had unobstructed view of the performer, and almost held my breath as I looked and listened. In spite of the reporter's mood in which for two or three years I had longed for the occasion, I could hardly bring myself to the task of

calmly making notes. The men of science, those excellent fellows who firmly believe that the truths of nature cannot be told with a view to literature in the telling, had been treating my dropping-song story to baths of dust in the waste-baskets of their garrets in order to give more glory to the specialists who study bird-song in college museums, and so I wanted to make a "scientific report" of what was now going on before me.

After the first long trill the bird extended its wings to almost their full length, lifting them somewhat above the level of its back, where they quivered with a delicate rapidity that made them shimmer in the sunlight. It now began to give forth phrase after phrase of quavering melody, which deepened in power momentarily, until, with a marvelous staccato cry, the singer vaulted into the air and whirled over backward, to flutter down through the foliage to a point in the tree-top some three feet below where he had begun. There it fell rather than lighted, and lolled half helplessly among the leaves, but pouring

out meantime strains so sweet and so flooded with ecstatic feeling that they sounded to me at times almost human. I have heard a soprano in a lift of fortunate self-forgetfulness trill like that above the ordinary register of safety. As I recall the occasion now it seems to me that all the birds in the grove suddenly ceased their clamor to listen to the master singer. Doubtless it was rapt concentration which shut out from my senses everything save the lyric of more than Sapphic intensity and abandon. Slowly the bird tumbled, with a peculiar throbbing motion of its wings, down from limb to limb, singing all the while, and finally dropped to the ground, where it stood swaying to and fro with its wings spread and quivering as if exhausted. Just then a female bird, doubtless its mate, took to wing from the spot where she had been chief witness of the exhibition. My point was made: I had discovered beyond question that the dropping-song was a love-lyric.

The art of nest-building as practised by the mocking-bird shows a good deal of the

shiftlessness proverbial of genius. The work is cleverly done in a way, though the sticks are flung together with a loose, sketchy effect, as if the builder were over-anxious to leave such prosy labor and get back to his song-singing. The nest is most often set in a crotch, or amid a cluster of stiff twigs only a few feet from the ground. The orange-tree seems to be the favorite site for the home of the resident bird. Migrants build higher, as a rule, and choose a situation well hidden by foliage. The inner basket of the nest is neatly lined and admirably fitted to the bird's form.

Although I cannot help associating the mocking-bird with the far South and French-Creole people, I have imagined that the individuals which habitually venture into Tennessee and Kentucky to nest are of hardier frame and display a more courageous disposition than those of the Gulf-coast; they are not, however, as good singers. Along the well-watered valleys of the Cumberland Mountains the birds appear in April and May, and sing for a

short while quite vigorously; but they are soon silent. In the Creole country you may hear them in full song from February till June. I found some of them nesting as early as the 10th of February on the Gulf-coast in 1890. The mulberry-blooms were unseasonably forward, and the frost, an unusually late one, caught the ripe berries on the 2d of March. The mocking-birds had been singing more than a month when this happened. Suddenly the multitude of gay revelers became dumb; not a voice cut the crisp, bracing air. Curious to find out what the birds were doing, I went into the orchards and groves to spy upon them, visiting all the nests that I knew of. In nearly every case a female moqueur stood on the rim of the nest, or close beside it, and not far away a male, muffled and disconsolate-looking, poised himself on one leg, the very embodiment of silence and frigidity. Next day the sun shone vigorously and the wind came up from the Gulf. Then it was strange to see the birds flitting and singing in the blackened and wilted tree-tops.

In the suburbs of Mobile, mocking-birds haunt every garden, grove, and orchard. Even in the shady inclosures around the mansions near the city, I have heard mocking-birds doing their most brilliant work. New Orleans is still more favored than Mobile. Its surburban population, with cottages, cots, and huts buried in trees, vines, and flowering shrubs between the city proper and the cypress swamps, is bird-loving to a degree.

During recent years the Gulf-coast has attracted the attention of fruit-growers. Pear-trees especially have been extensively planted, and many orchards are now bearing fruit. In the early spring, when these trees are in full leaf and bloom, the mocking-birds revel in them, swinging on their highest sprays, and blowing their fairy flutes from daybreak till evening dusk. Indeed, when the moon shines you may hear them dreamily piping at all times of the night, and it is an experience never to be forgotten when, as has often happened to me, the camper-out is half wakened from his deep sleep, to catch the tremulous,

drowsy phrases of a nocturne, all but unearthly in its sweetness, blown through the perfumed stillness of the Southern wood. Sometimes the birds hold a sort of idyllic contest, a number of them fluting here, there, yonder, till one might fancy that the spirits of the tuneful shepherds known to Theocritus and his friends were hammocking in the boscage round about.

These cheerful and brilliant concerts give the idly straying archer a fine background for his reveries. He indulges in vague poetic reflections not to be seriously recorded. The consciousness of anachronism, of being for the time immensely remote from contemporary sympathy, is stimulating. It completes recreation. With his bow on his shoulder, the string lying slack, and his quiver rustling at his side, he lives the life of Arcadia, yet is perfectly aware of playing a part with his own whim for audience. Aimless, well-nigh thoughtless, he treads at random the invisible yet perfectly apparent paths of the wilderness.

To stroll thus is to realize the ethereal.

It is absolute relaxation, an unhindered, unlimited bath in the freshest well of imagination. And it has its danger; for then comes the ancient perversity to give you a dash of disappointment. Just at the point of time when you are wrapped in the softest webs of dream, and are not expecting anything short of a divine poetic revelation, some large game-bird or rare animal is sure to offer itself as a tantalizing momentary target, only to disappear with a flicker of fur or feather when you begin to string your bow.

I remember losing the chance for a shot at a wild goose—out of season, to be sure, but a goose all the same—once on a fine morning, while standing agaze at vacancy, listening to a wood-thrush singing by a lake-side. The huge game-bird suddenly appeared, coming slowly awing round a thicket that overhung the water not twenty yards from me. It flew right over my head and swung leisurely out of sight before I could fairly comprehend the opportunity. An incident like that can leaven with bitterness a whole day of joy.

But back to our songsters.

An English artist, who tramped with me awhile in the Gulf-coast country, was so captivated with the singing of the mocking-birds in the orchards around Bay St. Louis that he would sometimes stand and listen in a rapture of delight. He afterward wrote me that the one haunting memory of our country—"a memory," to quote him, "which I can never lose, and for which nothing in the world would I lose"—was of the "bird-songs heard on that April morning when we sat upon the fence behind the sleepy old village and smoked our last pipe together." He often told me that the nightingale was not to be compared, as a singer, to our famous bird. I tried hard to give him the distinguished pleasure of hearing the dropping-song, but the effort failed.

Among the hundreds who have written to me about mocking-birds, the Hon. Theodore Roosevelt is the only one who mentions having heard the dropping-song. He heard it near Nashville, in the night-time. "I was immensely struck," he

wrote, "by the performance. Perhaps it may have been a narrow feeling of patriotism which influenced me; but certainly it seemed to me far finer than the song of any nightingale that I ever heard, and I have listened to them often in northern Italy." What a shame that even science should combine with vulgarity to add *Mimus polyglottus* to the already repulsive name of such a bird!

A Poet of the Poor

Were sunshine wine upon my board,
  Boozy every day I 'd be;
Were I a miser I would hoard
  All the sapphire of the sea.

OF all things pertaining to sedentary experiences, what is like a long afternoon in a hammock, when the sea-wind has free salt—as the chemists would say—on the edge of its breath? A book to read must be a part of the thing,—an old book, the older the better,—and there must be a wide view of the "merry multitudinous waves,"—κυμάτων ἀνήριθμον γέλασμα,—with sails, not steam-flares, hanging aslant over rusty hulls on the horizon.

Most people dream of riches when they swing idly; but I have had a delicious reverie over the pinched conditions of absolute

poverty. With mocking-birds carousing, much after the style of Anacreon, in the vernal tangles all around me and above, I have been reading Theocritus, meantime actually longing for a sheepskin cloak and a shepherd's flute. The Gulf's soft roar and the halcyon blue came to my senses confused,—as if sky and water were clashing color and sound,—while the splashing of pelicans added a note and some flashes of its own—a curious lulling discord. What a fine atmosphere it was in which to understand the ancient Arcadian singer!

Behind me in the pine woods a scattered herd of Creole cattle wandered, lazily feeding, the leader's neck bearing a pastoral bell that tinkled a drowsy, desultory tune, as the tunes of cow-bells go. Somewhere in the foliage overhead an insect hummed,—a lone one not yet found out by the mocking-birds,—hummed and tapped sharply against the twigs, with just a hint of spitefulness in each rebound. It was not a cicada, but the monotonous buzz, with its snappish breaks, would have charmed a Greek poet, and so it charmed

me. Between the lines of an idyl, as between the golden bars of a dream-tune, I watched the busy thing bumping and droning. It had the scorched color—αἰθαλίωνες—of idyllic cicadas. What more could I want?

But out of all the happy pastoral I drew something not to be had of bird, or bee, or flickering waves, or tinkling cow-bell, or from all nature as seen and heard from the hammock. The poet's lines distilled the honey of true contentment, and bedewed my soul with it, leaving me no excuse for any of those vague longings and repinings so dear to one who has not everything that the universe can offer. Somehow, moreover, the landscape, the dreamy air, the rioting birds, and the solitary insect, with all that they suggested or signified, slipped into the reading, while the hammock gently listed on the literary side, as though the book in hand had the weight of gold. "Sweet, indeed, the calf calls, and sweetly lows the heifer,"—yes, they were mooing while I read,—"and the cowherd blows sweetly on his syrinx, and

I too sweetly join in with mine." Or better, the very words — ah, infinitely better, the incomparable music of the Doric flute:

ἀδὺ μὲν ἁ μόσχος γαρύεται, ἀδὺ δὲ χὰ βῶς,
ἀδὺ δὲ χὰ σῦριγξ, χὠ βουκόλος· αὐὸ δὲ κὴγών,
ἐστὶ δὲ μοι παρ' ὕδωρ ψυχρὸν στιβάς.

It is said that we always have the poor with us; and we might strengthen the remark by adding that the rich are seldom at our doors. Another almost proverbial inscription on the lintel of poverty tells how happy is life in a hovel and how sweet tastes the crust of stale bread. That ancient suggestion, sandwiched between the camel and the needle's eye, is right cleverly counterbalanced by the blessedness and the heavenly inheritance of those who are sufficiently emaciated to go through without touching where a well-fed man would stick fast.

Doubtless poverty and a certain crude happiness have, under favoring environments, sometimes gone hand in hand; at all events, it is a human tradition, of great

attractiveness to the average healthy mind, that Arcadia is not wholly a myth. Persons now living will tell you that the pioneer days of log cabins, a pumpkin-patch, and abundance of wild game, afforded all the prime elements of the perfect life. Among the mountaineers of our Southern States, the naked factors of existence, the stark essentials, food, breath, traditional habits, a direct and narrow flow of passions, and a specific, almost perfunctory round of experience, suffice to brim the cup of life.

It seems that necessity born of hereditary indigence is perforce picturesque, and that want, when not self-conscious, rises easily to the dignity of a natural attribute of freedom—that it is, indeed, a part of the unconditioned original dependence of man upon Providence. In the traditions and legends of Arcadia we recognize what is but ancestral poverty and simplicity robed in the azure mist of distance. Imagination cannot have to do with contemporary life; it must have perspective, either to the rear or in the future, by the lines of which to

measure the proportions of its masses and its figures; and it must have remoteness for atmospheric illusions. The average human imagination has but two healthy dreams: one religious, the other in some form Arcadian. The passions of avarice, greed, sensuality, and thirst for power are but distortions of the simple, elemental desires. Wealth and its imagined blessings stand for a phase of the old Arcadian dream. To be rich is to have all that one wants, whether this be money and what it can buy, or but the boon of existence in a bucolic paradise.

So far as we know, Theocritus was the first poet to sing the fascination of pastoral life, and he was the last to sing it perfectly. Reduced to a simple reason, the power of his poetry—and it is wonderful—lies in the universal sweep it makes over the human heart just so as to blow the buds of premonition into rich flowers. It seems to be natural for us to long backward toward infancy and careless ignorance of sin, as well as forward toward the beatitudes of the future life. The Arcadian singer calls

us down the past to the childhood of our race, where so many of our dormant longings are rooted deep in primitive soil. His touch brings up the racy sap of ancient virility into our lives, and warms our hearts with the glow of almost forgotten elements. Our poverty, our utter indigence, as regards the primitive, natural pleasures of life, startles us as we read the old Doric flute-scores of this strangely gifted genius. How perfect was his vision of the original human simplicities! He had artisanship, knew how to turn phrases and construct word-melodies; but his knowledge of nude and rude character and his forthright art of sketching it once and forever are never subordinated to mere literature.

O Mother Ætna, I too have a home,
A pleasant cavern in the hollow cliff,
Where all the wealth of dreams is heaped for me.

When we know that the singer's treasure consisted of a goatskin bed, a hot pudding, and some roasted nuts, his primitiveness and his childlike sincerity are rounded to

perfection in our vision. He is rich enough, he "cares no more for winter than does a toothless old man for nuts," and by this we discover that he himself is in the habit of cracking walnuts with his molars!

> Lissome Bombyca, men dare call thee swart,
> Meager, and sunburned; only I can see
> That thy dear face pale honey-color is.
> The violet is dark, and the legend-bearing iris,
> Yet these for garlands are the chosen flowers.

What a clod! yet could sincerity possibly be better expressed? The starved soul in the hind makes the absolute sacrifice of love. No matter what men say, to him the emaciated, bilious wench is all that imagination can paint of beauty.

> The goat goes after cytisus; the wolf is fain
> To catch the goat; behind the plow the crane
> Feeds i' the furrow; but I, I long for thee.

Not so many years ago I was at a wedding. The groom was a 'sang-digger; the bride stood up barefoot to take the vows of Hymen. Evidently the twain were rapturously in love.

Gentle Bombyca, like carven ivory
Are thy two feet, and lulling is thy voice;
But thy ways, no words can tell of them.

Many descriptive passages in the pastorals fling out a fine reflection of what is most acceptable to the taste of these poor but carelessly happy rustics — running water, shady slopes, singing cicadas, gamboling kids and calves, and always the flute and the wax-bound syrinx, with Pan somewhere near, but never in sight, drowsing in his cave. The god, to our modern minds, seems the one conventional figure; but, after all, the day and the hour were his; he was a reality to the shepherds.

Honey and cheese are the titbits rolled under these untaught tongues. "As good as licking honey" expresses the highest comparison; but then, what could be better? One feels the nectar from the comb-cells dripping down over one's fingers. Who would not be a poor hind at such a golden moment? And the amœbean fluters—they seem to me the most perfect dream of rustic boys that ever poet's imagination painted.

I have followed with absolute impatience the labored efforts of learned dry-as-dusts to reconstruct the bucolics of Theocritus. Here are these fellows wrangling, guessing, suggesting, rejecting, contending, straining at verbal gnats, and dissecting conjectural substitutes for knotty phrases, when, in fact, the pastorals are perfect. How they go into a poor man's heart, those old echoes of the Sicilian mountainsides and of the vineyards and orchards of Cos! Even that much-mutilated Idyl XXI comes to me sometimes when the cares of work and the difficulties of life drive away sleep:

> Poverty, Diophantes, makes art leap to life;
> Poverty enforces work; for even at night
> The toiler's sleep is broken by his cares,
> And if he touch the outer fringe of rest
> To-morrow's task will rob him of his nap.

I can imagine two old fishermen, in their rush-wattled hut by the seaside, reading that story of their poor lives. I have been in such a hut on an island of the Southern Gulf-coast, and have slept on the fisher-

man's bed of grass or moss, have tumbled on a better couch, between the lonesome hours, thinking of what might be done to meet the merciless demands of need.

Two old fishermen once lay and slept
Upon a bed of seaweed in their hut,
Whose walls were wattled grass; and all about
Were scattered there the tackle of their craft,—
A toilsome one,—rods, creels and weels and lines,
Hooks, woven fish-pots, weed-entangled nets,
And ropes and oars, and one decrepit boat.
Under their heads, for pillow, a worn mat
Was helped out by their clothing and their caps.
Poverty stood sentinel at their shutterless door,
Nor was a watch-dog needed for such wealth
As their rough toil had furnished them withal.
Lonely were they, they knew no luxuries,
And ceaselessly against their scanty hut
With gentle motion rose the tireless surf.

My translation is scant, arid, almost literal; and yet I dare say that the reader unacquainted with the old tongue will feel the spell of a picture so true, so human, so touching. The moon is not yet half-way across heaven when the tired sleepers stir and begin to think of the coming day. One of them, Asphalion, grumbles:

They do but lie, partner, the folk who say
That when the summer days are long the nights
Are short; for I have dreamed and dreamed,
And yet no streak of morn is in the sky.
How is 't? The nights, surely they must be long.

Then they lie there and chat, and this one tells his dream—a dream of gold, which comes in the form of a fish, only to leave him more forlorn than ever.

This idyl is an extreme example of those hopeless poems which in some way exhale comfort. The whole list of pathetic word-pictures may be searched through in vain for another so brimming with reality and yet so isolated in its almost weird romance. Shakspere at his best never surpassed its naked dramatic skeleton, nor could he have clothed its bones with the flesh of a sincerer humanity. Some of the doctors say that Theocritus did not write it. I think that he lived it. In the art of setting up an isolated figure, self-sufficient and unconscious of any lack, an individual dramatic creation, Theocritus stands master. He was not in the least a playwright, but he had the direct and

unerring vision which discerns the foundation-lines of specific character. If I were asked to select from the literatures of all countries and of all ages the very best dramatic presentation of crude, coarse, rustic wit, my choice would certainly be Idyl V, wherein Comatas and Lacon fling back and forth between them their backhanded, clownish compliments. The piece opens thus:

COMATAS.
Keep clear, my goats, of that notorious thief
Lacon, the shepherd, who my goatskin stole.
LACON.
Hi, my lambs, run quickly from the spring!
That Comatas, don't you see him? He who filched
The other day my syrinx, he 's the lark.
COMATAS.
A pipe, indeed! What kind? When had you one?
You underling, you slave of Sibyrtas!
When did you quit a tooting on a flute
Of straw-stems cheap with little Corydon?

So the half joking, half bitter badinage proceeds until a singing match is proposed

and arranged. When this contest has gone on to its highest in a strain of inimitable pastoral, and has touched a point where Lacon seems to be getting the better of his opponent, suddenly Comatas drops back from his tender pitch of melody to a sneer and a snarl:

COMATAS.

Perhaps thou dost remember, sir, how I
Did one day warm thy jacket with a club,
And make thee twist thy face and squirm and writhe,
Hugging the body of yon oak the while?

LACON.

No; but I do remember mighty well
How thou wast bound there by Eumarides,
Who basted thee all over, up and down.

Theocritus, in these rustic pictures, set the pace not only for all future character-sketching in his particular field, but for all our modern dialect-writing. The best of Mr. Harris's "Uncle Remus" pieces are Theocritean, and Riley's delightful Hoosier rhymes belong to the same genus. Burns, the greatest of all the modern poets of the poor, was conscious

of his kinship to the immortal Syracusan. He wrote a poem "On Pastoral" in which he paid this tribute to his master:

> But thee, Theocritus, wha matches?
> They 're no herd's ballats, Maro's catches. . . .
> Will nane the shepherd's whistle mair
> Blaw sweetly in its native air?

None of the pastoral or rustic singers since Theocritus has been able to appear quite so complacently at home, as if to the manner born, nor so unconscious of being at vulgar work while making this plebeian song as was he. Our modern poets of the people cannot escape the air of stooping, if ever so graciously, to catch the note.

Jasmin and Burns and Hogg, and in some respects Ramsay, to say nothing of the poets great and small who have essayed to follow more literally in the track of Theocritus, are to be read, not as imitators of original Doric pastoral, but as the modern species of the ancient genus *Bucolicus*. Our American eclogue-makers —Riley, with his inimitable dialect fooling,

which shades off into exquisite pathos, tenderness, and sweetness; Harris, with his singular certainty of touch and depth of sympathy; Edwards, with his happy impressionism; and Page, with his charming romance—have opened ways of their own.

Tennyson's idyls are nothing if not of aristocratic caste. The Laureate fascinated all classes, but he never was a poet of the poor. Even the "Miller's Daughter" ranges above the staff of poverty and unconscious simplicity.

Theocritus was, in spirit if not in fact, a goatherd himself. It was his own nature that cries out:

> Sweet, O goatherd, is the pine-tree's sound
> Murmuring beside the water-springs. . . .
> Beside cool water is my leafy bed. . . .

His was the simple rustic bloom (θαλερόν) which breathed the perfect perfume of unsophisticated poverty. He strayed away sometimes from his pastures, his caves, his huts, and his hinds, to court the favor of the rich; but the characteristic charm, the

inner glow of his genius, the ἦθη of his Muse, are felt only in his bucolic piping and in that picture of absolute poverty in Idyl XXI. It is like living the herdsman's life along the sunny mountain-slopes to read Idyl VIII. One hears the flutes. Even in Idyl VII, where Theocritus begins to put on a student's airs, the musk of the goats is still blended with the summer day's opulence and flower perfume, fruit fragrance and the must of grapes and grain. Indeed, this goat-musk (κινάβρα) and the suggestion of rude cheese-pressers and the curd and rennet ought to be a passport to the favor of modern realists.

The little song at the end of Idyl X is a fine bit of rural wit and irony. I have heard the like, barring the inimitable art of hiding art, in the hay-fields of the West, but, of course, not in verse.

> Boys, the frog 's a lucky fellow; he
> Don't have to waste his wages for his beer;
> The drink he likes he swims in, don't ye see!

I have been going through these old Doric masterpieces again in memory of

the time where I first read them among the airy hills of Cherokee Georgia. There is nothing Doric in the best translations; you must go to the original; and to many a weary soul this would be like Riley's

> Going back to Grigsby's Station,
> Where we used to be so happy and so pore.

Shrike-Notes

WITH A BUFFON INTERLUDE

BIRDS are no respecters of persons, and if I were called upon to pick out the most independent and least diplomatic bird of them all, the shrike would be first choice without hesitation. No matter of what species, it is the shrike against the field, at any odds. He is a self-contained little fellow, with a military air, wearing his dress uniform in an unvarying mood of almost stolid complacence. An Ishmaelite of the strictest breed, he tilts against all avian comers with a view to murder pure and simple.

It is very easy to generalize about birds, as the poets and many of the ornithologists have always done. But when one tries to get at the details, there comes the rub.

From Aristotle down to Dr. Coues, science has stroked bird-feathers the wrong way; while from Pindar along the singing line to Tennyson poetry never has been able to tell the whole avian truth. There was Buffon, half poet, half scientist, and tipped with a ray of philosophy, who first made bird-literature truly delightful. But even he depended largely upon doubtful facts and vague guesses and analogies for the finest marrow of his ornithological essays. He blundered so charmingly about birds that when he was at his worst he fairly glowed with fascination. What a romance he might have made about the shrike, had he once got fairly to strumming the chord! Somehow he slipped it lightly by. And why, indeed, do I mention Buffon here? Possibly because, when I went to him for shrike-notes, I got so little, and yet so much. As usual, instead of turning away, I kept on reading from sketch to sketch—the cuckoo, the starlings, the hawks—right on and on, and almost forgot my shrike. Here was a master of bird-talk; here were notes worth reading, whether true or false

—the shrike could wait! Volume after volume was opened and browsed through at haphazard. It was like a stroll in an ancient and variegated wood smelling of moldy loam and damp, flower-haunted stream-banks. How many thousand years ago was it that Buffon flourished! Surely his tomes are as old as Homer's. The myth about corn-seeds taken from the Egyptian mummy-casket and growing when planted in our day is made true in Buffon's case. Out of his mildewed pages fall spores of literary life, to germinate, spring up, and bloom over wide areas of modern aridity long occupied by the grim skeletons of science. And while my shrike sits yonder on the tipmost spray of an orange-tree, patiently, nay stolidly, waiting for me to have my fill of studying him, I shall not fail to give the old naturalist some meager but well-meant instalments of what is due him.

Buffon's name is no longer one to conjure with in science, and those there be who affect to make fun of his work; but a few of us find the man himself one of

our pleasantest book-acquaintances, interesting for the very reasons given by the "scientists" of to-day for not liking him.

For my part, frankly, I dote upon him, because he liked birds in a sensible and natural way, which led him to write about them with enthusiasm as beings of beauty worthy of a good deal of poetry. Whatever may be his merits or demerits as a general naturalist, and however open to criticism this or that dry-as-dust specialist may find him, I select from his works the nine volumes devoted to birds, and ask nobody for advice while I enjoy them.

The comic part of science appears when the professor of our day trembles at sight of a well-turned phrase. An Indian out West would have a good name for Professor Dry-as-Dust; he would dub him "Old-Man-Afraid-of-his-Imagination." As for Buffon, he was a well-rounded man, both physically and intellectually, robust enough to be independent, and natural enough to regard his imagination with simple favor. Nor did the poetry in him shorten his life; he died at eighty-one,

and not then of old age, with plenty of flesh on his bones.

He was, indeed, too large a man not to have enemies, and, of course, Voltaire was one. The colossal dyspeptic, when Buffon and his "Natural History" were mentioned in his presence, snarled: "Pas si naturelle!" and thus sounded the key-note of ill-tempered criticism. The reconciliation between the two great writers suggests what may be called the "scratch my back and I 'll scratch yours" method now so popular with schoolmen in science. Buffon sent Voltaire a fine copy of "L'Histoire Naturelle," and Voltaire wrote a note of acceptance in which he hinted that the donor was a second Archimedes; Buffon replied that there never would be a Voltaire II, and then both were as happy as schoolboys with new tops. They shook hands across the chasm of self-admiration.

The nine volumes of "L'Histoire Naturelle" devoted to birds were issued during 1770–83. In their preparation Buffon was assisted first by Guéneau de Montbéliard, and then by the Abbé

Bexon, neither of whom has ever had due credit or discredit, owing to the shadow of their great master. Daubenton, who had been employed on the history, quit before the bird-volumes were begun, on account, it is said, of pique at having some of his work suppressed. There can be no doubt, however, that Buffon's genius went directly into all of the most important descriptive articles in these nine volumes, as well as into the various essays (such as they are) on classification, anatomy, distribution of species, etc. All of the ornithological leaders, so to call them, certainly were written by him.

To me there is no more charming reading than Buffon's ornithological romancing when he lays himself out to be at once exhaustive and brilliant. One can always rely upon his imagination and his style. Moreover, he knew how to give the fragrance of fresh discovery to nearly everything, and now, after a hundred years, his pages still exhale somewhat of their first bouquet. Critics of the scientific order

have—justly, perhaps—rated his ornithology low; but where is the carper among them who can escape the fascination of that which clothes and animates and colors his passages of mere description?

As an American, one might be captious enough to resent certain indignities to our birds. For example, Buffon insisted upon classing our beautiful little song-thrush, the cat-bird, with the fly-catchers; and he compromised with Klein (who made out that our flicker was a cuckoo) by saying: "Celui-ci semble faire une espèce moyenne entre le pic et le coucou!" Then he trims his pen and adds: "It is one more example of those links which nature everywhere sets between her productions." Catesby was responsible, however, for Buffon's statement to the effect that the golden-winged woodpecker did not climb tree-boles. But I must not begin this picking of flaws in my old friend's work, or I shall soon be like all the rest. Were Buffon alive to-day, I should, however, ask him to let me laugh my fill at his expression "ce pic demicoucou." A

half-cuckoo woodpecker is a phrase not to be scowled at; one must melt before it.

I know of nothing in bird-literature more curiously interesting than Buffon's essay on the woodpecker family. It has been the subject of much perfectly proper animadversion on account of its inaccuracies; but with all due allowance in behalf of science, it is a charming piece of literary art, in which the true woodpecker character is set forth with singular power. Some of the statements touching the exigencies and peculiarities of the life of the bird are very much exaggerated if we take them as of general application, and still more if we apply them to certain species. There are woodpeckers, however, that appear to fill exactly the mold of Buffon's description of their solitary, laborious, and stinted lives. Our American hairy woodpecker has a very hard time of it during winter north of latitude 35°. The same may be said of the sapsucker when the trees freeze up. But what I find most enjoyable in this particular essay is the artistic bouquet of it. Buffon had prob-

ably never studied the woodpeckers in their native haunts, and the admirable cleverness with which he assimilated the gist of what travelers, explorers, naturalists, and romancers had published on the subject stands as a special badge of his genius. In this regard he was like Shakspere, a great robber who appropriated the crude materials discovered by others and worked them over to his own satisfaction. Although he affected to disdain verse, he was essentially a poet, and let no opportunity for making a romantic impression slip his pen.

To this day Buffon's description of the mocking-bird's singing is better than that of any American ornithologist, so far as I have read. He had never heard our marvelous mimic; what he depended upon was found in the various crude reports of travelers who had penetrated our Southern woods and the field-notes of two or three amateur naturalists then laying the ground-sills of that beautiful structure of bird-literature which to-day is receiving its final decorations. After having studied the

mocking-bird more patiently and exhaustively, perhaps, than any bird was ever before studied, I can now, at the end of twenty years, freely say that Buffon's description is the very truest character-sketch that our king of song has ever been the subject of. It was a long way from Buffon's study in his garden at Monbart to a Carolina thorn-bush or haw-tree in which the moqueur was singing: but the great naturalist's genius had command of the range; his imagination grasped almost every detail of the performance, even to a strong hint of the rare dropping-song, which has been missed by all of our native ornithologists.

Buffon's chapter on the kingfisher is another inimitable piece of writing. We find strong traces of it in all the halcyon literature from that day to this; but if any student of birds would like a sudden vision of the difference between Buffon's notion of ornithology and the present exhaustive practice of specialism, let him compare the essay just mentioned with R. B. Sharpe's monograph on the family of kingfishers,

wherein are crowded with automatic precision all the obtainable specific details. One is literature, the other is science. The gap between them is ocean-wide.

In his paper on the heron Buffon is again at his best—large, learned, a master of his materials, so far as essay-writing can go; and it is to him that the general reader must turn to-day for the best comprehensive review of the old writers on the subject. Indeed, we look in vain to our encyclopedias in search of just what Buffon nearly always gives. Wilson and Audubon followed his literary method (at a distance) in their bird-biographies; but they lacked his learning, his free access to large libraries, and his almost unlimited correspondence with observers the world over. He knew the trick of selecting and compressing the bits of interest furnished by all his sources of information, and then he saturated them with his individuality of style; for he demonstrated with ease the truth of his celebrated phrase, "Le style est l'homme même."

Coming to the nightingale in the due

course of his work, Buffon evidently felt that he must do his best. Here was a bird upon which poets from the most ancient times had wreaked themselves in rhythmic praises. No genius had ever been too great to admire it with cordial enthusiasm. From Aristotle on down, philosopher, historian, and bard had vied with one another in writing about it. Now the Intendant du Jardin du Roi and member of l'Académie Française settled himself to outdo them all; and he did outdo them. His essay is, in my humble opinion, the best unscientific paper ever written upon a bird. When he laid down the pen there was not much left for others to add in the line of his study.

The edition of Buffon at my hand is that of 1827, in forty-two volumes, including the twelve by Lacépède. The illustrations are interesting chiefly as reminders of the long advance made during the past sixty or eighty years in the art of picturing natural-history subjects. If our descriptive ornithologists must still bow to Buffon as a master of style, it may console

them to know that if they can gain a place in one of our first-class magazines (I do not hint that they can) their writings will be sure of infinitely better illustrations than the great author of "L'Histoire Naturelle," with a king to back him, could command. And, after all, it would be doing injustice to the present charming school of Thoreaus, and Burroughses, and Mrs. Millers, and Bradford Torreys, to compare them directly with Buffon, who actually imagined that he was a dry-as-dust during the whole of his long and laborious life. He was not the man to go into the woods and fields and around the Waldon ponds, spying upon the birds and reporting what he saw, and so he missed a great deal of personal pleasure, and his literature has very little of his own adventures in it. The gain was in masses of information and large dashes of enduring color.

But yonder still sits my shrike on the tip-top of the orange-tree, a sullen expression in his whole bodily pose. He is all countenance, and it is the countenance of a heavy-shouldered, short-necked, large-

headed rascal who never in his life had a qualm of conscience on account of his base deeds. His sedentary quiet serves him two ways: while digesting one of my greenlets he is surveying opportunities for his next brutality. With my glass I take leisurely looks at him, particularly noting the steadfast, darkling stare of his eye, a typically predatory orb.

He is king of the garden, a tyrant rude and sanguinary—killing, now for food, and then for fun, hanging his victims on the spikes of the trees and leaving them to dry into mummies as light as old leaves. In my realistic moments I credit him with much good done in impaling grasshoppers and young mice, moths, and caterpillars; but most of the time he passes in my imagination for nothing but a Nero whose whole nature is a puddle of blood-stained cruelty never stirred by a breath of tenderness or sympathy.

The shrike is, indeed, a bird that has caused me a great deal of pleasant trouble. The three, or, speaking conservatively, the two, species inhabiting our country do not

greatly differ in nature and habits, while they may be identified at a glance, even at some distance, by their specific exterior markings, and by their respective sizes. *Lanius* is the family name (in English "the butcher"), an ugly adjective qualifying a beautiful and curiously fascinating little free-lance in the world of wings, where he gaily tilts against the field.

The phrase "pleasant trouble" comes so near to expressing the half-success, half-disappointment attendant upon every attempt at systematic shrike-study that I shall emphasize it by repetition. No bird of our woods and fields can be more pleasing or more troublesome. His air of indifference, amounting almost to stupidity, is a constant source of vexatious surprises. You trust his apparent unconsciousness time after time, in the face of treacheries over which you have vowed never again to be misled. He seems possessed of powers all but uncanny in the way of playing open and shut with himself. Now you see, and now you don't see, what he is up to.

Shrike-Notes

Last winter I renewed my pursuit of the shrike under favorable conditions. Both varieties of the smaller species, the loggerhead proper and *excubitorides*, were seen, the latter appearing to be more numerous than the mocking-birds, which they very strikingly resemble in a general way. With a good glass the markings distinguishing the two (*ludovicianus* and *excubitorides*) may be made out quite satisfactorily, especially the black and white about the eyes and on the tail-base. One or two notes of observation seem to me worth preserving, as they go toward disclosing a certain resemblance between the character of the shrike and that of the sparrow-hawk.

On a small tract of wet land, in which grew here and there a stunted live-oak tree, I saw a shrike following a small flock of sparrows. It was manœuvering to take one of the plump little fellows unawares; but an observer not well acquainted with its nature and the peculiarity of its disposition would scarcely have suspected what it was trying to do. The trees were

not only stunted, but were half dead, their stiff branches bare, save that a few leaf-tufts showed in places and some beard-like wisps of Spanish moss clung to them. On the stiff, spike-ended dead part of a bough the shrike, when I first saw him, was sitting still, quite in the habitual attitude of a sparrow-hawk, while the sparrows were fluttering about in some tall rushes and grass on the margin of a ditch. Two or three minutes later he dropped nearly to the ground, and then flew swiftly, close to its surface, until he reached another perch within a few yards of his chosen prey. From this new point of observation he took a quick view of the rushes wherein the sparrows had hidden themselves; then he flew level along until he was directly over the grassy tangle, and there hovered in air for nearly a minute, quite stationary, his wings quivering at full spread.

A raw, stiff breeze was blowing from the northwest, but its force did not appear to trouble the shrike. He turned presently and went back to his perch, where he stayed a long while motionless. A

sparrow at last ventured to the top of a tall weed or rush stem, and began to chirp. Another and another appeared here and there. But the shrike sat like a mounted specimen until they began to feed again. Suddenly, then, straight and swift as a shot, he cut the air and struck. I heard a cry of agony, a pinched and bitter squeak, and saw the little butcher bearing away a sparrow weakly struggling in his claws. Many a time before this I had seen the like, so far as the main incident went; but the act of hovering in mid-air over its quarry, as the sparrow-hawk does, was novel and interesting.

Another curious fact of which I made a note was seeing a shrike take in its claws a large brown butterfly while on the wing high in air. It would not have been so strange had the bird's beak been used instead of its foot. I saw the little tragedy from beginning to end. The butterfly was making one of those apparently aimless flights, zigzagging with erratic, jerky wing-strokes about fifteen feet above ground. Just as it passed the top of a

yaupon-tree, out flew a shrike, and made a dash at it, but missed it. Then began a fine exhibition of aërial gymnastics, bird and butterfly tumbling about, at first so rapidly that I could scarcely keep an eye on them. In the end, however, the inevitable death came. One of the shrike's feet gripped the insect with an upward stroke, while the bird was flying backdownward and under its shining prey! I have seen a hawk at twilight catch a bat by precisely the same manœuver.

Shrikes were building their nests in the yaupon-trees as early as the 9th of March. I tried to find out whether or not they ever carried the sticks for their nests in their claws; but they were refractory: not a touch of work would they do while I was spying on them. Indeed, even in my absence the building that I had under special observation went on very slowly. For two or three days together no appreciable progress was made, and on the 22d of March it was scarcely half completed, only the wide, loose foundation having been laid in the thorny crotch.

It may be of interest if I describe a shrike just received from Japan. The friend who sent it (a mounted specimen) trusted it to a paper box by the post, and when it arrived its shape and plumage had been somewhat set awry; but the close resemblance to our Louisiana shrike (*ludovicianus*) is surprising. The Japanese bird may be a trifle smaller than ours, and its colors are less bright. The black stripe on either side of its head passes across the eye (without the white dots or borderings that distinguish our sentinel shrike) and ends at the base of the upper mandible. The white of its lower body is not pure, being tinged irregularly with pale rust-brown, which becomes evener and heavier on the sides below the wings, running as far back as nearly to the root of the tail.

The specimen, looked at fifty feet away, could scarcely be distinguished from the loggerhead; but nearer inspection shows, besides the differences already mentioned, that its breast is closely and evenly marked with dim, wavy brown lines, and its chin and throat have a dusky shadow vaguely

obscuring the white. My friend, in a note accompanying the specimen, says that the Japanese shrike has much the same habits as ours, but he gives no particulars.

In the scuppernong-vineyards and pear-orchards of the Gulf-coast, shrikes and mocking-birds live together apparently on right easy terms. At nesting-time, however, the mockers drive the shrikes away when they come too near their chosen building-places. Doubtless, our little butcher sometimes dines upon a fledgling songster when the parent birds are absent in search of food. I have known it to kill young ones in a cage that hung out of doors, and this—as I have told in another paper—is the foundation of the belief that mocking-birds feed their young poison worms to kill them when in captivity. The shrike is the real culprit, and is mistaken for the mocker, which it so closely resembles in size and markings.

Not long ago I saw it stated that some peculiarly fortunate naturalist had been hearing a shrike sing; and a New England woman wrote me that she, too, had lis-

tened with delight to a fine burst of joyous twittering from the butcher's throat. Upon MacGillivray's theory of the production of bird-song there is a sound basis for believing that a shrike is capable of making good music; but I have no faith in that theory, Huxley to the contrary notwithstanding. The singing shrike was really a mocking-bird that had strayed far northward; and it did not sing with a tiny valve far down in its windpipe—it did not sing at all, but whistled, just as a boy whistles, only its glottis served instead of puckered lips. The song-bird has no vocal cord; the little membranous valve described by MacGillivray modifies the avian voice, but it does not make the sound.

But here again is the bone-yard of the scientists, where walk the ghosts that will pounce upon those famous dissecters of bird-song organs as soon as they have paid Charon his ferry money. I am guilty to a degree, and must in turn take my punishment. Just now, however, I shall steer wide of any discussion likely to aggravate

my doom. The wind is sou'-sou'east, with a hint of orange-bloom fragrance on its wing-tips—a Caribbean wind which blows in the northward-going migrants. Now is the time for my shrike to show his mettle. The season of sport opens for him when a tide of gaily painted singers and twitterers breaks upon the Gulf-coast. He harries every animated feather-ball within eye-shot, but in fact kills few. In the ecstasy of his diabolical fun he even finds his voice with a short cry very far from musical. A day or two, possibly a week, he rages in his own quiet way, if I may so state it—and then, after impaling a few tiny innocents on the orange-tree spikes, he again settles down to his ordinary show of inscrutable stolidity.

Were I a poet the shrike should have an ode to celebrate its peculiarities, an ode as remarkable as Shelley's on the skylark. I would rhyme a word-melody telling all about how he killed my baby chameleons and worried my mocking-birds while they were rearing their early brood. Of course I could not rhapsodize over the song he

never sang, but I could honestly expand upon his beauty; for he is both fair and beautiful from tip to toe—

> Hic, et
> Candidus et talos a vertice pulcher ad imos.

Terrible as he is among the delicate, undersized songsters, he is one of the fine notes of force, form, and color in all our fields and woods. Human history owes much to Nero; even the poets have thrived upon his record; the shrike should have been named nerornithos.

The Touch of Inspiration

THE art of describing things with the utmost economy of words and at the same time with absolute picturesqueness of effect is nearly always exhibited as if by accident. The poets have a way of surprising us with these unexpected flashes of success in reproducing the most striking phenomena of nature. The words,

> Ragged rims of thunder brooding low,
> With shadow-streaks of rain,

bring up in the imagination a perfect sketch of a thunder-shower on the horizon. One feels the cool, damp wind-puffs from the distant cloud, and sees the slanting films trailing on the dim hills. There is a mellow sound of disturbed elements and throbbing storm-troubles in the phras-

ing. Tennyson often makes these aërial sketches, as if with a single twirl of the pen. He paints us a great thunder-cloud that

> Topples round the dreary west,
> A looming bastion fringed with fire.

In this instance the effect is as complete and immediate as if it had not been produced by comparison; for instantly we recall by direct retrospection the great lunettes and curtains of the aërial forts we watched when a child, and remember how at regular intervals the whole structure toppled strangely as the lightning filled it, and the sun, already down, burned its edges. From my winter place on the Gulf-coast I have often seen immense dark cloud-fortifications rise along the horizon, between the blue sky and the green-blue water. Presently the moon would appear, to heat the parapets to a silver glow, intense as white flame from a blow-pipe.

When Keats, in his pathetic thirst, longed for a beaker of the warm South,

With beaded bubbles winking at the brim,
And purple-stainèd mouth,

he had absolute vision of his subject. The description is marvelously accurate, with the added wonder of inexpressible suggestion. What color in that draught! What alluring bouquet! What iridescence in those magic bubbles!

Sometimes the phrases used in these happy moments are descriptive of things we all have imagined but have never seen. D. G. Rossetti, in his superbly beautiful "Blessed Damozel," strikes into view, as with a calcium-flash, a vision of souls ascending to heaven. They are compared to "thin flames," and what other phrase could be used with such effect? Again, in the same poem, a perfectly human element is made to relieve an access of extreme artificiality by the sudden statement of the fact that the homesick girl's bosom seemed to make

The bar she leaned on warm.

Immediately the description is complete, and we feel the circuit of sympathy fill

with the current of absolute life and glow with tender fervor.

I have often quoted from Emerson the verses:

> Aloft in secret veins of air
> Blows the sweet breath of song.

Who has not heard that breath wandering overhead on a drowsy summer day? It is not a strain for the physical ear,—the realist never catches it,—but it steals into the soul and masters it like music in a dream. Then, there is a line dropped by Mr. Howells in his youthful days; it is a perfect picture of young maple-leaves when they are upturned by a frisky springtime wind. He sings of them as being

> Blown silver in the breeze.

Mr. Lowell's inquiry,

> Oh, what is so rare as a day in June?

retains its fragrant suggestiveness despite the badly rhymed college response:

> Boarding-house beef called "underdone."

It was Shelley, I believe, who wrote the striking lines:

> Hell is a city much like London,
> A populous and a smoky city.

To my mind, the idea of genius has been never better expressed than by Coleridge's verses:

> He has fed on honey-dew,
> And drunk the milk of Paradise,

from which we catch, by instantaneous understanding, the whole secret of the very miracle by which such substances as make poets' visions are assimilated and redistilled to the uttermost subtlety of meaning.

When old Chaucer says:

> Thann longen folk to gone on pilgrimages,

he fixes forever one of the most delicate, elusive, and universal of human moods; it is the mood of balmy spring, when the far-away and the vague are calling us into the purple mists just over the horizon.

The Touch of Inspiration

Oftentimes the poet, by some almost inexplicable process, conjures up an expression which literally means nothing, and yet bears in it, as a mirror might, the reflection of something strangely rich in meaning. For example, Villon's verse:

Ou sont les neiges d'antan?

so perfectly translated by Rossetti:

Where are the snows of yester-year?

Baudelaire sings of the warm waves of the Southern seas as

Infinite cradlings of fragrant idleness.

When Burns says to the birds:

Ye mind me o' departed joys,
Departed never to return,

his vision of human sadness is as direct and as immediate as Shakspere's ever was at its highest dramatic reach.

By what trick is it that Cowper needs to go no further than

Oh, for a lodge in some vast wilderness!

to show us the wilderness itself and the identical lodge? His wish goes in upon our imagination and calls up the universal longing. We have seen the wilderness before; we have helped, long ago, to build that cabin. The poet has dipped his pen in our heart, and has written with the color of our dreams. Each one of us has his special wilderness, his ideal lodge amid the solitude.

Swinburne, the most musical of contemporary poets, is a master of surprise. He passes from the supremely artificial to the simply natural with a suddenness and completeness that fairly captivate the imagination. Examine the two lines:

> Where tides of grass break into foam of flowers,
> Or where the wind's feet shine along the sea.

The upper verse is a type specimen of deliberately thought out and finely wrought conceit; the lower comes into the mind and the soul like an unexpected glimpse of a breezy ocean rolling its white-capped waves far and free. How different

and how affected in comparison appears the familiar description of the wave that

> Caught a star in its embrace,
> And held it trembling there!

The true descriptive maximum seems to be an overflow—the effect of excessive momentum. The imagination overreaches the expected and touches some chord of truth supernally beautiful or surprisingly suggestive, by a sort of accident due to a spurt of energy spontaneous and irresistible.

The dramatic surprise is quite different from the lyrical. Its play is in the field of human action, where motive flashes through the substance of thought like electricity in steel. The great playwrights know the pulse of the world, and how to make it leap or stop with the power of but five words. The born actor is he who knows by intuition where to find these lucky reaches of expression. The decadence of the novel since 1870 is largely due to the neglect of dramatic and descriptive surprise. Compare one of Dumas's

best romances with the best recent analytical novel, and there will be no escape from regret. That Dumas's style has been surpassed by recent writers cannot be denied; that his stories occupy too much space goes without the saying: but he was not ashamed of his imagination. We shall have no more good novels till the Scotts and the Dumases return to us. They must return, however, fully abreast of the time, and able to take in the meaning of the later civilization.

The poets have dwindled, too, under the pressure of materialistic realism. We shall not see much truly great poetry so long as the dramatists and the lyrists restrain their imaginations. Realism has never produced one permanent drama, one immortal novel, or one enduring lyric.

A Marsh-land Incident

A SCHOONER, listing sharply to a fragrant breeze, gives me the motion that I best like, when I stand well forward, feeling the kiss of chill spray over the bow. The delight is emphatic after a long rain (alternating shower and fog), during which nothing better than a swarm of mosquitos has offered relief from the lifeless monotony of a breathless sea. Indeed, it was like magic when I awoke and felt the swell under me. I sat up in my little musty bunk, rubbing my eyes, then hurried on with my clothes. No sooner was my head above deck, as I mounted the narrow ladder, than I smelled as well as felt the weather's change. Half the sky was already clear; the breeze had the fog going, while our little schooner flew after it like a bird.

Two swarthy, wrinkled sailors were mopping the deck, one of them whistling contentedly a lugubrious tune, so his looks suggested, while the other grumbled in mongrel patois. Right ahead of us, under the lifting fog, I saw a marsh, beyond which a forest of live-oaks was dimly outlined. As my skipper had told me that we were off the west shore of Borgne, I at once recognized the place, and gave orders that the schooner should be sailed into a bight at the mouth of a little bayou coming through the marsh from the distant hummock-lands. In fact, we sailed up the bayou for a mile or more, and lay to, the men lowering a boat in which I was to be rowed to the live-oaks.

It was interesting to observe the silent, almost stupid curiosity with which the old water-dogs furtively gazed at my archery tackle; but they asked no questions, leaning to their oars vigorously. The bayou narrowed, as we ascended its winding water, until there was in places scant room for a full sweep of the oars. Two or three marsh-hens showed themselves

for a moment on the mud at the edge of the stream, then darted into the tall grass. Gulls flew overhead, their wings shining like snow against the blue sky.

The prospect of a whole day alone in the wood toward which I was going by a flight so lively made my blood tingle; and when at last, an hour after sunrise, I stood on shore, waving good speed to the returning boat, I was as happy as any bird. In the distance lay the schooner, as if on the marsh itself, her wide sails curling gently. Behind me, less than a bow-shot away, the oak-foliage and the gray-green moss twinkled in the breeze. I heard bird-voices, a red-cockaded woodpecker's most distinctly, in the first fringe of the wood.

Swinging my bag of luncheon over my shoulder, and making sure that I had all of my tackle, I went splashing through a bit of rushy marsh direct to the nearest trees, where there was a little bluff marking the hummock's limit. Pretty soon I hung the luncheon-bag on a bough and marked the place. The breeze here was strong enough

to make way with all of the gnats and mosquitos in the open parts of the wood, and the magnificent wide-armed live-oaks and water-oaks looked like immense apple-trees—an orchard of the gods.

I stood still, looking all around. But what had become of the birds heard awhile ago? Not a sound could I hear, save the multitudinous rustlings of the wind. No wing-shine flashed across the aisles. The impression of solitude was perfect. Of course, I had not expected to find a swarming wood in midwinter; but I well knew that this utter silence and stillness could not last; so I strolled on deeper into the shadows, and the first sign of animal life to attract my attention was a tiny brown creeper going spirally up a big tree, amid the lichens and ferns. I stopped to make a note of this, according to habit; and while I was putting away my book and pencil a large bird flew along close to me and lit on a branch not twenty yards distant, but amid the leaves and moss, so that I could not see it. From the merest glimpse, as it went by, I

supposed it to be some species of hawk. To ascertain I drove an arrow to the spot, guessing at the proper place. It clipped keenly through the tangle, with a whack upon a tree-bole beyond, and out rushed the bird, which proved to be a golden-winged woodpecker.

My arrow's stroke seemed to shock the whole wood suddenly into life. I saw a dozen birds in the next ten seconds: blue jays, woodpeckers, a mocking-bird, and several small species that I could not identify. Upon all of these I used my field-glass, not my bow. It was not the season of song, but many voices chirped and whistled cheerily as I passed slowly and noiselessly along. What I most wished to come upon was one of the small deer said to abound in the place. But this was not to be; nor did I find any game larger than a woodcock during the day. The event which made my tramp worth special record (wherefore this paper) began after I had walked entirely through the wood and emerged upon a marsh-prairie, covered with low grass in the

main, but dotted irregularly with tufts or tussocks of high weeds and rush-like plants —a plashy area half covered with water.

I had stretched myself on a big log to rest, my back to the wood, my face to the marsh and the sea beyond, and had lain thus for half an hour, when a small object moving slyly at the edge of a tussock caught my eye. A peculiar satiny gleam betrayed it, and then I saw the form of a heron. Out came my field-glass, and in a moment a beautiful egret was stalking apparently almost under my nose. It was the Louisiana egret, a rare bird now, so many have been killed for their beautiful plumes. Of course it was not in full feather; but it was lovely even without its fine purple trail, and every movement displayed a tint of color exquisitely delicate. I saw that it was feeding upon what it got by stabbing the mud with its bill, probably some kind of grub or marsh insect. Its eyes flashed with a reddish light and had a singularly cruel expression. The purple of its neck-feathers and crest shimmered softly in the sunlight.

While I was looking the bird suddenly quit eating, crouched in a frightened way, then skulked into the tall growth of the tussock. After half an hour had elapsed, and while I was writing in my note-book, it reappeared and stood with its neck stretched almost perpendicularly to its full length. I watched it for a long time before it moved in the slightest, then it resumed its feeding. It was uneasy, however, and I noticed that it frequently gazed upward as if half expecting some calamity from on high. I looked to the sky for a sign of danger, for I thought that a hawk might be circling overhead; but all was clear.

A few minutes later the heron suddenly flattened itself upon the mud, its wings slightly spread, its neck drawn close to its body, and at the same time a peculiar noise, a low, whizzing roar, fell from above. I glanced up, and at first saw nothing; but the sound rapidly increased, and then I caught sight of a large hawk rushing almost vertically down. It was still very high; its wings were almost close shut, and its velocity was doubling

momently. As it neared the ground I could scarcely follow its movement with my eyes; but I saw that it was not swooping upon the heron. What it did strike was a meadow-lark, a hundred yards farther away from me, which it bore off to the woods.

As for the heron, it lay quite motionless for a long time, evidently in a very trance of terror. I observed it closely with my glass, and do not think a single feather on it stirred. Indeed, the bird lay there as if dead, save that its cruel red eyes burned like live coals. After a while I tried a shot at it. The arrow fell about a foot short, but flung mud all over the sheeny plumage of the heron's back and neck. That was too much; the trance was broken, and away flew the beautiful thing far across the marsh.

When I went to recover my shaft, some snipe flashed swiftly out of the grass, with their rasping cry: "Scaipe! scaipe!" I marked them down and followed; but they would not lie until I got near enough for a shot; so I returned to the

wood's edge, where now the birds of song were noisy, piping each in his own key. Luck a few minutes later gave me a great opportunity, as I find it recorded in a weather-stained note-book to which I confided much more than mere entries of shots and their results, and maybe the flavor of an archer's log will not be bad. At a venture I will transcribe a page:

> Had crept for some distance under cover of a magnolia-bush,— trying to approach a log-cock,— when by some chance an indirect ray of vision fell upon a much larger bird standing in the oozy mud beside a little black puddle. It was a wood-ibis, shining white in the gloomy place. I think it the finest specimen I ever saw.

You will see that the note in its last sentence bears the inference of a successful shot. I recollect it well: sixty yards, and a small rift in a thicket to shoot through — a very trying piece of work for an archer. The flat trajectory of a rifle-ball eliminates such a difficulty; but an arrow at sixty yards rises five or more feet above the line of sight,—of course, I speak of heavy hunting-shafts,—and this often

causes serious interference with the shot where the trees, branches, and undergrowth are thick. A nice calculation must be made in an instant, and the factors are many, each one absolutely important. In the present case I had plenty of time; for the bird did not see me or even suspect danger from any quarter.

Have you ever heard a bow-shot in a lonely forest, when the wind was still and nothing but wild bird-voices broke the primeval silence? It is a memorable sound; not a "twang," as the poets say, nor yet a dead "flap," but rather a subdued yet ringing noise (like that from a smitten tambourine muffled in cotton), and followed by the low "whish-sh" of the flying arrow; then the stroke. It is all one phrase of three notes. You may think it would not impress you; but I tell you that few natures are proof against it. It is an elementary, an aboriginal voice, with singular power in it.

A friend of mine who had been, in his youth, a tireless woodsman in the far West, told me about lying, once upon a

time, half asleep at the root of a tree. For many days he had been wandering all alone. It was high noon, and he felt the need of rest. The great forest was still, silent, gloomy. Suddenly a sound, "chuff!" fifty yards away, was followed by a sharp whisper, and then "whack!" an arrow struck into the tree's bole an inch above his head! A lordly savage, who was a poor archer, had taken a chance shot at him from behind a rock. "Well," said my friend, shaking his head in memory of the "close call," and smiling reminiscently, "an arrow sounds scarier 'n any bullet!"

To this moment that shot at the ibis is a fresh line on a page of my experience, and I can scarcely realize that it was years ago that I loosed the shaft. I hear the bow's sturdy recoil, the keen sibilation of the arrow, the dull, successful stroke. Doubtless the joy of an archer comes from a deeper well than that of the man who shoots with a gun. I have tried both weapons. It is almost infinitely easier to take game with a fowling-piece than with

a bow; but the demand which the old implement makes upon one's patience, wariness, stealth, skill, is of itself an endless fascination; and when, at last, the successful shot is delivered, something strangely and inexplicably thrilling comes out of it. Moreover, the simple fact that shots are many and killings few may account for the greater part of sylvan archery's fascination. The archer shoots for the joy of shooting, not for the bag's weight.

I have read old Roger Ascham's "Toxophilus" in many an ancient wood, while resting and waiting for the wild things to show themselves. Ascham was no sylvan bowman, nor is his little book adequate to the needs of one who aspires to successful wild-wood shooting; but it is a quaint style he wields, an ancient and moss-covered diction, so that nosing over "Toxophilus" in a wild forest nook has its justification and its comfort. By my note-book I am reminded that after I had secured the ibis, and duly taken its dimensions for ornithology's sake, I sat down, with the great bird on one side of me and my bow on

the other, to read awhile, as is my way. "Got Ascham out of my pocket," runs the note, "and read him for an hour—the stilted old scamp! In my opinion, he was but a book-archer, shooting poorly even with his pen; yet somehow he managed to get into the current of eternity, and here he is." Yes, sure enough; there he was, archaic spelling and all, telling me how to "shote."

But, curiously enough, neither Ascham nor the magnificent ibis, neither the fine shooting at herons, a little later, nor the exhilarating walk back to the boat against a freshening breeze, could affect me as had the little egret when it flattened itself on the ground in deadly fear of the downward-swooping hawk.

Art and Money

HORACE did not change countenance or offer even a formal objection when I seized him, stuffed him—I do not know which end foremost—into the pocket of my shooting-coat, and upon him deposited a ham sandwich. He may have enjoyed the jaunt I gave him that fine March morning. To tell the whole truth, I forgot all about him and the luncheon until after a long, breezy tramp through an orchard-land, the pear-trees flecked with snowy blooms and the peach-clumps still shimmering in a robe of dreamy pink, and after two hours of shooting in a verdant marsh-meadow, when I sat down to rest on the buttressed roots of a small live-oak, which stood solitary beside a little creek or tideway. Then a nip of hunger sent my hand

to my sagging pocket, and I discovered that Quintus Horatius Flaccus had somehow got himself on top of the sandwich, and had smashed it to pulp, save that the liberal slice of ham lay comfortably greasy and quiet between two odes, anointing them with artistic impartiality.

Disappointment on my part did not seem to disturb the old poet, who complacently dreamed on, while I ate the amorphous remains fished out from among his lyrics, *non sine fistula*, the meadow-larks piping in the green grass round about. So I took him for dessert, as it were, beginning with the first ode and reading straight away to the last verse of Lib. IV, Carmen XV—just two hours and forty-five minutes by the watch. Many of the odes I knew by heart; but they are always fresh when I read them. Herons and kingfishers joined me while I mouthed those mellow vowel-sounds. "Kee-owk!" cried one. "Twidg-g-g-dt!" repeated the other. They behaved as though they meant to exasperate me until I should risk a shaft or two at them beyond the creek, which was too deep

for me to cross. One splendid queen egret (*Hydranassa tricolor*) dropped to a little tussock on the opposite water-line, not forty paces distant, and posed with incomparable grace. I sat so still against the tree that even those piercing eyes did not distinguish me. The wind was in my favor, blowing lightly and steadily, and by slow degrees I worked my field-glass up so as to take a look. I like to study these very shy wild things unawares at short range.

As for the kingfisher, it was doing a trick, now and again, which these birds have learned in the regions where there are no trees, rocks, or high banks for them to perch upon. It hovered stationary in the air a short distance above the water, using its wings merely to sustain itself, until a little fish was discovered; then like a bolt it plumped down, with a liquid sound and a sparkling splash. Invariably, when unsuccessful, it rose again, almost perpendicularly, to its former altitude, uttering its harsh, giggling cry, "Twidg-g-g-dt!" and ruffling its shining crest, as if mightily excited. When tired it came and perched

on the topmost dead spire of my tree, but observed me almost instantly, and flew away far down the creek.

Horace, meantime, had shown all the vast indifference of genius, taking no notice whatever of my preference for the birds, knowing that it was but temporary, while his fascination was more enduring than brass. The pretty egret walked along beside the water, and presently passed out of sight behind some rushes and aquatic weeds. "Jam te captum teneo," said Horace, and I settled again to my reading.

Maecenas, mearum
Grande decus columenque rerum.

There it is again. In the second verse of the first ode it was

O et praesidium et dulce decus meum.

When a poet has a Mæcenas he is a fool if he neglects to flatter him. Horace is not a fool. He knows who it was gave him his Sabine farm and made it possible for him to sip *veteris pocula Massici* and lounge idly beside the sacred well-heads. Ah, this lounging, this leisure, this ampli-

tude of reflection! What if one could have it all in this iron age? For my own day's outing with my bird-tackle and Horace, I shall have to work at double stint for a whole week. Indeed, the desk-obligation weighs on me too often in the midst of the infrequent recreative delights which come by way of stolen interviews with nature.

In spite of a determination to be wholly wild, careless, and free, the sense of truancy steals over me. I must make money; for I am an American. The scribbler must live and thrive as well as the best, and it is not possible to live and thrive on marsh air and bird-study. Doubtless there is something in our civilization which engenders a coarse practicality. We are trying to write practical poetry, practical novels, practical dramas; we are painting practical pictures. And the whole end and aim of art would seem to be money, money, money. The target now shining against the slope of Parnassus is a well-stuffed purse.

But we are a jolly lot, we latter-day

artists. What we miss in the way of that fine, tenuous dream-film on which the old-time masters lived, we gain in roast beef and potatoes, ham and eggs, pâté de foie gras, and plum-pudding. We have no trouble about what the coming generations are going to think of us. Give us present vogue, a pull at the horn of plenty, stir up in our behalf a roaring advertisement, guarantee the box-receipts, and you may have all that posterity could possibly award to our memory on the score of high artistic accomplishment.

Well, you may say, had n't the Greeks a like view? Live for the present, was their constant cry. True enough; but note the difference: Their theory of life did not affect the substance of their art. They did live for the current moment; but into their art they dashed the last refinement of leisurely and conscientious labor, the highest power of idealization. And after them the great Latin masters did likewise; so did the giants of the Renaissance and the founders of modern art and letters. A conscientious regard for the sacredness of

art, holding inviolate the duty which binds the compact between the artist and those upon whom his art is cast as a bread of life, gives the sacred joy after which every inspired soul goes seeking in the golden region of creative life. It is the joy of the bird in the green grove, the joy of the bee in the season of honey-flowers, the passion of gathering and combining in the heat of inspiration, in the rapture of imagination.

Tantus amor florum, et generandi gloria mellis.

Tennyson, the noblest poet since Shakspere, has shown us how this undeviating devotion to art through a long lifetime can round up the stature of a great man. As that distinct something which we call a great personality, we must regard Alfred Tennyson above all the Englishmen of his time. He affected more powerfully a greater audience than any man in the world born within the past century and a half. Carlyle, Gladstone, Goethe, Napoleon, Browning, Bismarck — not one of them has touched and influenced half as many souls as the great dreamer of "In Memoriam,"

"Idyls of the King," and a hundred incomparable lyrics.

No novelist since Scott has half compared with him in universality of influence. Here again a mighty man grew apace with the man's art. Scott was not what we call a fine workman, but he was great, and in love with workmanship; he sacrificed himself on the altar of literature. No one can read his life without regretting that misfortune and a mighty sense of honor forced him, in his later days, to do what we are all doing without compulsion. He ground out literature, and his life, for money. He is the most illustrious example of the *auteur d'argent.* But he is also the one Homeric figure of modern times, and the most pathetic of all time.

Reading the letters of the late Robert Louis Stevenson, edited by Mr. Sidney Colvin, is like hearing a soft Southern sea booming "Money, money, money!" while the sky smiles and the winds smack of nard and spice. Think of a writer with an income of twenty-five thousand dollars a year forever worried because he has not more!

Stevenson was a delightful knight of the quill who never cheapened his work in order to increase the output; but he burned himself up as a candle by which to see his financial way. We feel, in reading his books, what literature he could have made had he been quite free to write just what and how he pleased, with not even the tail of an eye on a guinea.

Ah, the good old days when the artist had his rich patron, when the poet had his pension! We may well sigh back at them, as at the golden age of our tribe. Then it was that the writer could have his own way, his own time, could play with a subject as a cat with a mouse, or spring upon it and devour it bodily — always obeying the instinct of his genius. Really, this is the return to nature—namely, to do what one's genius dictates, uninfluenced by the fashion of one's time, unmindful of the quotations from the literary market reports.

A Scott wringing his giant mind dry and dissolving his great physique in order to cover so much paper with so much literature at so much the page; the vision of Ste-

venson wreaking his frail life upon the effort to touch the lucky nerve of fortune—these and a hundred other examples are not half so distressing to one's sympathies as a case like that of Sidney Lanier or Henry Timrod or Paul Hayne. There was, in the fate of the three Southerners, a singular leer of the god we call Ill Fortune. They were not money-artists; they wrought in the old-fashioned high sincerity, with but one aim, to give the greatest beauty of form to the greatest beauty of thought. They died penniless, but with souls as white as snow. Every thought they set to song was as pure as distilled water; but they could get no money. Perhaps the moral is—if there is one—that a true poet should have had better luck than being born poor in an age when money is so necessary to that leisure which alone insures great art.

We are inclined to be jocund at the expense of the poets who try to boil their pots over the heat of those little space-fillers in the magazines. But, in fact, how pitiful! "Still," says the up-to-date rhymester,

"I 'd rather have ten dollars earned with my oaten flute than a hundred got by bookkeeping." In a word, the ambition of our singer is

Signatum praesente nota producere nummum.

Money truly is the root of all evil. What further argument against the old saying, when we even find the Muses singing and dancing to the clink of coins, and measuring their smiles by the length of a purse?

Cur Berecyntiae
Cessant flamina tibiae?
Cur pendet tacita fistula cum lyra?

Oh, poetry is a drug in the market; there is no money in producing it; that is the answer, Mr. Flaccus. A stale joke sells for more than an original poem. The best ode that you ever wrote, sir, would not to-day bring enough money to buy you a pair of trousers. If you doubt my word, try the experiment; offer an "Ad Chloen" or an "Ad Melpomenen" for the price of a toga, and then, after you 've been laughed out of the office, my dear Horace, try and

repeat that little phrase of yours about *amabiles vatum choros*, if you please. *Amabiles*, indeed!

But, Horace, I am done with you; for a purple gallinule has come out of the wet grass yonder and is standing in all its beauty on a pad of spatter-dock floating and swaying against the creek's low and muddy bank. Now there is the body of symmetry for art to copy, there the color to haunt the poet's imagination. How perfectly the royal tints shade into one another! A shy, dainty, graceful little thing, moving lightly with sea-blue flickerings and half-liftings of wings and tail, it somehow suspects the near presence of danger, yet dares to go farther and farther, with many quick starts and keen glances, its agitation intensifying both its brilliance of plumage and the expression of its attitudes. Nature never produced a more charming bit of grace, color, life. Keats wrote an "Ode to a Nightingale," and Shelley one "To a Skylark"; I wonder how much I could get for an "Ode to a Purple Gallinule"?

Return to Nature

Ille terrarum mihi praeter omnis
Angulus ridet.

IT is growing difficult, even in the quietest nooks of the country, to find a primitive wood, a grove standing just as nature made it, with not an ax-mark, not any evidence of man's destructive meddling, above or below, on the ground or amid the branches on high. When such a boscage is come upon, however, the distinction of its air betrays its age and its vital splendor, as we sometimes see unquenchable youthfulness illuminate the countenance of an octogenarian, suggesting an inner source of perpetual renewal.

The soil in which, from the beginning, trees have flourished, fallen, and decayed, where leaves have moldered for untold

centuries, where seeds have sent up new shoots to grow slowly but surely, is nature's original material, out of which freshness is made. Under the dense canopy, in the dreamy gloom, listen well, and you may hear the sweet sound of labor going on—the *nemorum murmur*—underground, high in the tree-tops, far and near, roots, boles, branches, leaves, all strenuously drawing upon the invisible veins of earth and air.

A rich, musty smell pervades every space between the clumps of dusky undergrowth (where, beside a rotten log, the Indian turnip has come up here and yonder), an exhalation wandering and elusive, not known outside of the savage wilderness. It is an effluence good for the imagination, fertilizing it, sowing it with ancient spores of originality. Like a whiff of song from Arcadia comes the breeze through that crepuscular haunt of slumber and growth, whispering old Greek phrases to immemorial tunes.

I have found in the Southern mountain regions many pathless wood-nooks, set aslant against the rocky ridges, where not

a sign of human life could be seen. A stream is always the central line, the axis upon which the charming solitude has been revolving through the ages. And in the damp, still thickets along the water's way lives the wood-thrush, with his wonderful song-phrase always at his beak-tip. He sings of the lily, the lily that I have never seen, the "mountain-strolling lily"—οὐρεσίφοιτα κρίνα—known to Meleager.

Why not think over again the far-off poet's delightful felicity of expression? Here I am beside a gurgling stream, deep in the stillness of eld, surrounded by the *divina voluptas* distilled from substances absolutely pure. What I breathe is unsophisticated, what I assimilate can build up no imperfect tissues, make no feverish blood. The wood-thrush and I, we have found Arethusa, we have lipped and beaked a smack of Hybla. We hum in unison:

> The mountain-strolling lilies blow—
> θάλλει δ' οὐρεσίφοιτα κρίνα.

I demand explanation. What is this haunting sub-thought, not quite reachable,

dimly glimmering under a poet's perfect phrase, under the bubbling of fresh spring-water, under the wood-thrush's shy song? Naturalists, ornithologists, and dictionary-makers are blind, deaf, numb in every sense, when they attempt definition. What could be more stupid, for example, than Liddell and Scott's "mountain-haunting" in explanation of Meleager's phrase, just sung by the thrush? These dry-brained scholars, desiccated in the book-parched air of libraries, do not understand the fine activities of a poet's pen and mind; their criticism is a sort of paleontology. Like all "scientists," they are ashamed of word-blossoms and phrase-dew.

But here is my wood-thrush in the primeval grove, artlessly and absolutely correct, rendering to the untainted air what should go down through the Greek lexicons for evermore as the definition of οὐρεσίφοιτα κρίνα — "mountain-straying lilies." I know this, for the bird's voice broke in upon my reading and caught up my imagination, bearing it away to the hills, far, far—how very far! And I saw

the lilies, as if hand in hand, going idly and happily up the slopes and over the peaks to the valleys beyond.

Furthermore, the wood-thrush lays upon his liquid flute-strain a strange weight of interpretation not to be misunderstood in this garden of sincerity. He tells me why the lilies wander across the hills; it is to search out the secret of unfading beauty. Just over beyond the summit, in some favored dell, there is a spot, the paradise of lilies, whither the rovers all are bound. And now that I think of it, I have been there myself, eastward of Yonah, beside a brook, and have spent a week and two days with my fly-rod and the anthology, some notes of which dallying-time are in the little soiled pocket-book on the desk before me. I wonder if I am the only person in the world who finds a haunting, wavering, elusive something in certain strokes of Greek poetry comparable to no other impression save that made by bird-phrases in a lonely wood? Keats nearly coincided with me in feeling when he wrote:

> The voice I hear this passing night was heard
> In ancient days by emperor and clown.

But his allusion was not directed particularly to what has so often held my imagination suspended between a bird-note and a wonderful word or sentence echoing back through purple centuries. Not the obvious meaning, but the absolute inner thrill engendered by a turn of diction, is the thing; and such a thrill the wood-thrush can send through me with his song.

The other day I was under a maple-tree in a wild little dell not far from the center of Indiana, listening to a cat-bird's song and at the same time making the following note on a page of my Greek anthology:

What about F. W. Bourdillon's verses:

> "The night has a thousand eyes,
> . . . . . .
> And the heart but one."

I wonder if the poet had ever heard Plato's lines:

> "'Αστέρας εἰσαθρεῖς, Ἀστὴρ ἐμός· εἴθε γενοίμην
> οὐρανός, ὡς πολλοῖς ὄμμασιν εἰς σὲ βλέπω."

O my star, at the stars thou gazest; would that I were the sky, that I might look upon thee with many eyes.

It was no plagiarism, even if Mr. Bourdillon had Plato's very words in mind; for

it is the work of genius to fill new combs with old honey redistilled. Our nineteenth-century poet sophisticated the Greek thought with a Celtic sadness much to the taste of our time, albeit his name is French.

The wild flowers grow thickest and most luxuriant on spots where many generations of flowers have fallen down and decayed. Out of the old Greek mold fresh life bursts when the true poet stirs it. Go read Swinburne's lyrics, and feel how original they are, and yet how they connect themselves back with what was sung while yet men and women heard Pan fluting beside his cave.

Men change, but true song does not change. On the bough yonder the thrush repeats what was a thrush's song ten thousand years ago, and yet how thrillingly sweet! The joy of it never comes amiss to the ear of man or bird. The "mountain-straying lilies" are to-day just like those that Meleager saw; but how beautiful! Our poets complain that nobody reads their songs. Well, do our poets go to nature for the key-note, as did the

singers whose chords have remained true and irresistible for centuries?

But what does it matter to the genuine poet whether his contemporaries read his songs or not? No question of commercial values ever went into a true piece of art; the one all-embracing concern was the expression of inexpressible beauty. A song of the cat-bird or of the wood-thrush is just that, no matter when or where sung, and the longing of the lilies, as they wander over the hills, is just that in all ages. So much, at least, we may gather from a primeval wood-nook and an hour with the old anthology.

By a Woodland Spring

Πίδακος ἐξ ἱερῆς ὀλίγη λιβὰς ἄκρον ἄωτον.

THE obsolete word "sourd" has always tempted me, as most forbidden things have, through some not exactly definable fascination arising out of mere vagueness and remoteness. It comes to my tongue's end and to my pen's nib whenever I speak or write about a spring. It is a cool word, a bubble of refreshing significance rising through my brain, as you have seen the crystal globes quiver up, clear, chill, sweet, from the vague depth of a well-head.

Soberly speaking, why shall one be bound by the dictionary at all hazards? Of course there must be an academic tradition in literature, a supreme source, to which we return seasonably for the conventional bath; but a word is not to be

escaped when it rises out of a thought's center and proves itself to be the absolute expression. Even the dust-covered and shelf-worn scholar must feel the difference between mere word-hunting and the vigorous freedom of using the very word of one's choice. A case of logolepsy is easily distinguished from the perfectly sane mood which demands and imperiously seizes the λόγος, the pregnant sign, and makes it the exponent of a hidden power.

I am sitting on a mossy log with an open book on my knee. At my feet a little spring puts forth its trickling runnel. The well is clear and strong, a voice of nature which says: "Sourd, sourd, rise and flow on!" Water is not aware of the academies and the obsoletes; possibly this is why its noise is so charming in these cool places of the woods. Overhead the crowded, dusky leaves shake with a sound of multitudinous kissing, and one trim wood-thrush goes like a shadow through the bosket yonder, piping a liquid, haunting phrase, which wavers between the extremes of joy and pain. There is just

enough light here to read Keats by—the light of neither sea nor land, the soft crepuscle of a thick forest.

An expert bookworm could see even in that shade and from a distance of ten paces that the volume I am nursing has opened of its own accord at the beginning of the "Ode to a Nightingale"; and here the pages are much thumbed and the words dim, as if worn thin by much reading. The leaves lie flat to the left and right, with an expression of habitual attitudinizing for effect, a mannerism caught during the quarter-century that, as boy and man, I have been preferring this particular ode; indeed, the pages always part at this place and spread themselves complacently limp—conscious, one would imagine, of the allurement they possess for the present reader.

In nature's solitude is the place where you can read this "Ode to a Nightingale" with full appreciation of its art. The library, the lamp, the must and bouquet of fine learning, do not afford the adequate entourage for a bit of such exquisite literary craftsmanship. Indeed, the

final test of art is when you lay it upon nature; and its triumph is when it reaches beyond the unsatisfying limits of nature into the dreamy yet real distances of imagination. The bird intuitively makes avail of this, when it sings, by laying its voice in a film of ventriloquial deceit, so that oftttimes the listener is scarcely able to decide from what direction the song comes. Lyric poetry of the highest sort leaves you in a tremulous, twilight doubt between the real and the ideal. This doubt at once arises when you begin to read Keats's matchless ode in some wild, rank nook, deep amid the undergrowth of a primitive wood.

In the study, among books, where the atmosphere is artificial, one does not realize the elementary ancestral trick of genius with which Keats, the divine boy, manipulated language so as to make his thoughts seem naturally suggested by a nightingale singing. But when read in the presence of facts thrust up by the actual heave of nature, these melodious minors of the poet's harp betray the artful fingering of a divinely sophisticated musician.

It is a "regular ode" in the critic's nomenclature; each stanza of ten verses stands complete, with an invisible *da capo* at its end. After reading the first we know them all, so far as real musical form goes. But the thrush yonder knew this trick before any poet was born; its song-organ has repeated over and over, through countless ages, the one thrush stanza. Keats repeated his but eight times, and left the most wonderful creation of art to be found in English poetry. I lay stress on the word "art"; for, to my understanding, Keats's ode is not, like one of Burns's songs, an improvisation without forethought or smack of cunning. The wonder of it really lies in the enormous amount of book-knowledge which has been distilled to get its essentials, and the craft with which these have been sprayed, so to speak, through the almost faultless stanzas.

From such words as "hemlock," "Lethe," "Dryad," "Flora," "Provençal," "Hippocrene," he at the outset draws the drug for a philter, with which he strangely stimulates, and at the same

time sweetly stupefies, the reader's imagination. Perusing the first two stanzas here in the thrush's grove, I see the trick of allusion, which is also illusion, and smile at myself for ever having trusted so implicitly the poet's sentimental mood, and for not having broken, in the very earliest reading, the iridescent bubble of his art.

And yet Keats made his ode just to my liking. Many a time I have tried hard to find a place where I could better it, even with the change of a word; but the phrasing defies revision. The poet was very young; he must have been inspired, for how else could such a vocabulary have come to a mere boy? I can find no poem of equal length this side of the Greek wonders to compare with the "Ode to a Nightingale" on the score of the splendor, variety, breadth, and comprehensiveness of its verbal riches. On a simple stanzaic pattern, eight times occurring, the diction is wrought into luminous figures which strike the mind with the effect of an impossible melodious tapestry. This is lit-

erature of the rarest sort, finished to the minutest detail. How could a youth just out of his teens command such wealth of literary materials?

The thrush yonder knows the secret of style, which is generic and hereditary; the rose-purple flower of the cypripedium is style: but this amazing diction could not be born with the poet; it is a bookish acquirement ordinarily attained to by dint of a lifetime's sacrifice. The poet and the bird part company in song at this point of extra-natural expression. Like the oscine warbler, the poet is born with an organ of melody; unlike the bird, he is conscious of a necessity for enriching the tone of his instrument and varying its notes. Literature is conscious art, and poetry lacking literature cannot live. Every thrush of a given species sings the same song; every true poet is the only individual of his species. The one intense, life-wreaking struggle in the art of song is to avoid the bird-organ limit of expression. Many a poet has flung forth one almost perfect creation, and then sung it over and over,

or stood evermore dumb, for fear of the almost insurmountable wall that fate has built across the way to ever-changing, yet ever-characteristic, originality; while for eons the thrush has ground out his one melodious stanza, happily unconscious of a million repetitions. Nothwithstanding all this, which demands serious thinking, I cannot evade certain rays of humor flashing straight out of the subject.

After all, the poet's dilemma has its absurdity, which might almost be placed under the sign of an irrational number, as mathematicians do it. Art often suspends the imagination between the wine and the roast,—*entre la bouteille et le jambon*,—so that it is impossible to be either original or elegant, either sparkling or savory. Genius shows its quality in extricating itself from this predicament. It squares the circle and invents perpetual motion, raises a surd to rationality and glorifies whatever it touches. But the poets who have great talent without genius, it is they who make us laugh while they do their antics in the bath of words. What foamy

struggling! Phrases and phrases, old coin reburnished—changing the figure, old types regrouped. They can see nothing new under the sun; they grimace and show the stress of their voluntary agony.

Betimes along comes an enthusiastic boy by the name of John Keats, hailing from a livery stable, later a surgeon's apprentice, a tall, sickly, shy fellow with no regular education, and before he is twenty-five he writes the most perfect ode in his country's literature, taking for subject a bird which from the days of Sappho had been the victim of all the singers. It would seem impossible that this callow stripling could make a single new phrase on such a theme. Centuries ago the nightingale became itself a note in the hereditary cry of poets of the second order. But mark how one of the first order strikes a new chord from strings worn to tatters over that ancient fret. And, by the way, hear that thrush in the green tangle, and the well-spring gurgling. Sourd, sourd, bubble up, flow on forever, sweet stream of song!

A Swamp Beauty

A RATTLESNAKE struck at me from under a horizontal palmetto-leaf, giving me a twinge of horror. It was a solid specimen, with great fangs curving on each side of its little tongue, and I had touched it lightly with the toe of my boot —but not intentionally. When its tail whizzed I sprang back just in time to get barely out of range. The jab was a sudden and wicked exhibition of malignant energy, albeit strictly in self-defense from the snake's point of view, the force of it appearing to hurl the hideous monster, still but half uncoiled, bodily along the ground. It may have been imagination, yet I should not hesitate to say upon oath that the rusty colors on the thing's back and sides

brightened as if anger had sent a heat to the surface.

One who has never heard the rattlesnake's song—for I must call it that—can form no just idea of its strangeness and power. In volume and pitch not much beyond the tremulous rasping of a grasshopper, it is a sound not to be forgotten or mistaken after it has once touched the ear. There is a quality in it as distinct as the zest of a fruit, as memorable as the fragrance of sassafras, and as terrible as a first glimpse of death. These are incongruous comparisons, but not more so than the elements of that indescribable jarring hum made by crotalus in the lowland jungle. It is not a whit more terrible actually than the noise of a cicada; but yet something in it has power to stir up the deepest fountains of cowardice in one's nature.

A rattlesnake struck at me, as I said a moment ago, and that is why I so clearly recollect every incident of that day's outing. A genuine shock of horror seems to quicken every cell in one's tissues and

sharpen the point of every nerve, making the brain open itself, so that the moment becomes a datum point, the beginning of a new reckoning. Doubtless I carried with me all the rest of the day an echo of those vibrating scales and a strange impression of my narrow escape from those shining fangs. The adventure may have been strictly appropriate as a preface to what followed; for it turned out that I was to pass from snake to snake-bird—not a very great step, considering Huxley's discovery of the close kinship between reptiles and birds; and besides, a *Plotus anhinga* had just dropped off a cypress knee into the coffee-colored water of a little creek fifty yards away.

Upon general principles one would suppose that when a bird lets go its hold and falls perpendicularly from its perch to the water, it is sure to be found swimming on the surface; but this rule will not apply to *Plotus*—the snake-bird—even under most favorable circumstances. As its name —πλωτός—implies, it is a great swimmer; but it prefers being under the

surface, with not so much as a feather showing, while it shoots along swiftly as a fish; or if it must have a little air, you will see its head come out, barely enough to show a reptilian eye, behind which and below wriggles a shadowy neck, apparently without a body. Decidedly uncanny, indeed, in all its ways, is this rather beautiful and very interesting bird of our plashy low country.

In my own experience the snake-bird has been a problem by no means satisfactorily worked out. It is a shy creature, haunting, for the most part, difficult or inaccessible places in swamps and watery jungles, where mosquitos and moccasins congregate in numbers beyond reasonable belief; but upon the day now under discussion I had an exceptionally good opportunity, which I used industriously, to make some additions to my notes and observations on its singular appearance and habits. It is a bird difficult to describe. When flying low, so that it is seen about level with one's eyes, it shows its markings to best advantage. A clear

grayish white broad stripe passes across its shoulders, in strong contrast with the iridescent greenish black of its general plumage. But its form is more striking than its colors. About three feet in length, with wings of beautiful proportions, an attenuated neck, which when outstretched looks like a delicately modeled lance tapering to an exquisite point, the whole bird appears much slenderer than it really is. In the sun its feathers shine with a peculiar glint, not unlike that of dark-greenish water when flecked with alternate leaf-shade and bright light. All of its movements may be best described as unexpected. No matter how well acquainted with the bird's ways you become, there is always a surprise for you.

When I reached a point quite near the stream's bank I saw nothing of the snake-bird, so I sat down to wait, as I often find profit in doing when in a wild place, for something to turn up. On the side of the creek opposite to me a thick magnolia growth stood like a hedge, and in the oozy soil under it rank plants were crowded so

closely that their roots kinked in knots along the surface. Both cypress and sweet-gum trees grew in the shallowing of the stream, the cypresses throwing up tall knees and loops from their wandering roots. A faint yet distant touch of liquid-amber on the air, and a soft rustle of magnolia-leaves, made the place sweet despite the coffee-colored water, the rank air-plants, and the ill-smelling muck.

A cat-bird entertained me with pretty antics while it scolded hoarsely. Some other small birds appeared and disappeared in the thicket, and presently a small sandpiper came twinkling along just above the water, to stop on a little sand-bar, where it stood for a while, half lifting its wings and flirting its short tail, its body meantime wagging up and down. I slipped out my binocular glass to take a leisurely view of the field, which was thus beginning to stir with life, and just then something cut the water surface gently; a thin head, tapering and long-billed, projected above a rippling line with a flaring wake behind it, while, dimly observable,

just under the water wriggled a long, shadowy neck and boat-shaped body. It was the snake-bird, evidently quite unaware of my presence, playing one of its favorite tricks, swimming, as a water-moccasin does, quite submerged, save its acutely triangular head and beak; and a moment or two later it had climbed with agile awkwardness to the top of a cypress knee.

For perhaps ten minutes I studied *Plotus* through the glass, noting every move, even to the leering turns of its cruel eyes. Its attitudes were few. Most of the time its neck formed a gentle reversed curve, the head and bill pointing upward at a considerable angle; but it had an eye on the water, and when a fish, or some other attractive thing, came along, down it plunged, making scarcely a sound, disappearing in the midst of a dimpling swirl. Time and again it did this, promptly returning to the cypress knee to resume its watch. In repose the bird is beautifully marked. The head is mottled dark gray and black above, yellowish under

the chin, a light gray stripe obscurely descending from the head along the neck for six inches; below this the neck and breast are intensely black, with a fine bottle-green shimmer. The wings, too, are black, with a gray band across near the shoulder. Tail black, with a pale yellowish ash tip. I made note of the cat-like claws, curved and sharp as needles, which enabled it to climb from the water up a tree-bole or cypress root with great ease. Its legs were short, its feet flat as a duck's, and its tail nearly a foot long.

In dropping from its perch the snake-bird goes down headforemost; but sometimes, while swimming, it dives backward, darting tail foremost out of sight; or it gently sinks rearward, gradually going down until only its little sharp head is above water. No bird, not even the loon, not even the pelican, is a better diver. In the cypress wastes that border Lake Okeechobee I have seen groups of snake-birds posing on the tallest tree-tops, their bodies and necks stretched upward and their wings spread to full length in the

sun. The specimen—for it is mounted now—that I have been describing did this singular bit of attitudinizing for me on the cypress knee, holding its bill agape meanwhile, its little eyes shining like deep-set, reddish jewels.

In one respect the snake-bird—a pity the beautiful creature has a name so squirmy!—is fortunate. His haunts will probably never be destroyed by man. The swamps and everglades of the low country seem destined to hold forever their dreary perfection of damp, desolate, irreclaimable loneliness, where *Plotus anhinga* may live on, keeping up its strange, serpent-like wrigglings, and decoying enthusiastic naturalists deep into the mire and quicksands beside the dull, coffee-colored waters. And how the mosquitos do sing and swarm there! How the moccasin-snakes do writhe and threaten! Worst of all, how the huge rattlesnakes jar their linked tails and strike venomously home from their coils under the dwarf palmetto-leaves!

But the mocking-birds are not far away.

A short tramp brings them within ear-range, so that I know just how soon to expect an orange-grove or a fig-orchard. It is good to blow out of me all the swamp-whiffs I have inhaled, and let them give place to fruity wafts and bloomy puffs borne along by a saltish sea-breeze. And when I meet a jolly-looking negro boy, who gazes interrogatively at my dangling snake-bird and says, "Gwine to eat 'im, boss?" —when that happens, a good laugh rounds up a right pleasant incident; and presently, emerging from the wood, I look seaward over a flat waste to where, on the water's rim, glitters the crescent outline of the town, with its slender church-spires, its variegated roofs, and its gardens of massed and wind-tossed foliage. I take off my cap and serenely mop a flushed face, while all the beauty, all the charm, and all the subtle and inexplicable strangeness of the drowsy South steal through me like a succession of gentle yet thrilling waves — a flood of inspiration for which a poet or a painter would sell his birthright and become a glorious outcast.

In the Woods with the Bow

SOME person — a pessimist — said, just when I do not know, that the stories were all told before Homer's time. Another added the remark that there were but five stories to begin with. Art doubtless has limitations which confine strict originality to a very small space; but nature defies all peripheries—she browses at will up the slopes of countless Helicons. Her stories are in number as the sands of the sea, as the leaves of summer, as the changes on sky and clouds when the wind aloft is strong and the sun burns bonfires along the hills that notch the horizon. Books may be but variations of ancient monotonies; I do not deny it. Men may have nothing new under the sun to think, to say, to write—the poor fellows; it is little

that I care. Give me a fortnight of freedom in the woods of spring and I will find a freshness infinitely changeable, an originality varying with every puff of the breeze. Give me an outing—you may as well, for otherwise I shall take it by force; I must have it. And what is an outing in the green woods to him who bears not the longbow?

Now if you ask why the longbow is to be lugged in, I answer—because. It goes, or I stay. I would rather delve at my desk, with the good yew unstrung standing there in the corner beside the ancient tall clock, than to undertake a ramble in the hill country without that trusty monochord across my arm. We have been boon companions these many years, my bow and I, and it is now too late for a change of relations. We go together into green solitudes, and find places where Diana's footprints are yet almost visible, the spot, still warm, where Pan took his noonday nap.

I am usually in the low country of the South when a desire for the hilly region

begins to stir in me. As the birds migrate so do I. Where the palms and pines, the magnolias and the live-oaks flourish, there I go in winter. When a green wave of exploding buds and rapidly developing leaves rolls gently northward, beginning late in March on the Gulf-coast and reaching Indiana with the last days of April, I try to keep pace with the oscines. Steam and sleeping-cars aid me at need, when the springtide makes a flower-sprent dash, or when the migrant songsters put on a spurt of speed here and there.

All the winter I have been entertained by the wild fowl of the sea, the shore-birds, the waders, the divers, the long-legged inhabitants of marsh and rushy swale. I have lost some valuable arrows in sloppy jungles and on miry bayou shores, where I shot at rare specimens and got them not. Even the big sea opened its mouth and swallowed a shaft or two, pile, feathers, and all; for the pelicans flew low over my boat, flapping lazily, fine targets to tempt the most saintly archer. The man at the helm looked asquint at me and grinned

when my purring missile went a hand's breadth ahead of the pelican, causing it to back its vast wings and somersault rearward in ecstatic surprise.

But the arrow—how it slanted away on high to curve slowly and dart with accelerated speed down, far off, into the creaming whitecaps! Some men take wine to stimulate them, some take tobacco, some, like Coleridge and De Quincey, even opium; but I take a bow-shot at a bird. Daniel Webster liked to play a fish; other great men have delighted in a roaring gun when the bevies rose from the stubble: for greatness, too, takes a joy out of savage sport. Still, for myself, in all humbleness be it said, let the solitude of a wilderness of wood or water surround me, and let me hear my bow's one fine note, followed by the long, low hiss of my arrow. Some have called this savagery; others have seen in it a dangerously attenuated esthetic-ism; but heathen coarseness, or the last refinement of artificial ideality,—be it whatever it is,—I like it better than wine, tobacco, cards, the theater, or any other

indoors excitement—yea, even far better than polo, golf, or tennis! But do not set me down as one who decries the taste of his brother. Go on, O friends, in the way you best enjoy. As for me, up from the breezy low country of the heron and the ibis, out of the plashy everglades where skulk the gallinule and the limpkin, away from the coffee-colored streams where the snake-bird dives and wriggles, and where the least bittern croaks, I go my way once more to the greening hills of the Carolinas.

I have sent home an order to a certain deft whittler of arrow steles whom I know in Indiana, and he will forward a sheaf to meet me at a town in a valley not far from a mountain's toe, where a fretful, chill brook prances over smooth boulders on its journey to kiss a river. There, too, birds will join me. I imagine I can hear them now; but in fact it is yet a month before we shall be there. Meantime I sail northwestward across the Gulf to the Terre Aux Bœufs for a few days' shooting; then to the Rigolets and the marshes of Borgne,

where it is good for the bowman to stray; the next flight being by rail, through Mobile and Montgomery to the Sand Mountain's southern slope, whence, after three days given wholly to delight, away from the iron-mills of Birmingham I flash, clipping a corner off North Georgia, to come plump against old Yonah at the feather-end of the Blue Ridge, where many well-heads bubble in lonely dells, and where the rhododendron in due season paints its cheeks to delight the wind.

Night had fallen when the train slowly curved into the little mountain village. A rickety trap bore me and my tackle to a forlorn hotel, which was perfumed with kerosene not unmixed with jowl and cabbage; but the room they gave me was airy, and the bed had sheets as clean and white as a water-lily's petals. The young man who sported a rhinestone bosom-pin behind the office desk looked benignly upon me after I had registered, and presently he said:

"A package in our care for you."

It was my arrows from Indiana, a bundle

to gladden my heart. Two or three commercial travelers eyed my bow in its green cover and my quiver tied up in its bag, —sized me up, as they would have expressed it,—and yawned. They thought they knew me, but they were greatly mistaken. It was I who knew them, a jolly lot, each one trying to "figure up" his expense-account so as to cover the cost of seeing Jefferson as Rip Van Winkle in Atlanta, and losses at billiards in Knoxville, with a reasonable certainty of having it audited and passed at the home office.

Next morning I was up at the crack of dawn, having expressed my luggage forty miles by rail deeper into the hills, so that I could be foot-free to tramp with my tackle. Early risers who had come forth into the main clay street of the town looked at me as at some outlandish being, what time I strode rapidly past them, my bow uncovered, my quiver at my hip, my trousers inside my long stockings, and my little field-glass swung under my right arm. A big butcher, standing in a low door under the sign, "Meat Market,"

hitched up his white apron and gave me a carnivorous stare, while his heavy underjaw lolled on his breast.

In the east the sun wavered amid a drifting purplish film, like a huge cherry-red bubble shot with iridescent fire. It seemed slowly to wax hot and refulgent as I left the town behind me, and when presently the tilled fields opened on either hand, great beams flashed across them, the meadow-larks twinkling here and there like sparks flung up from the kindling ground. Some crows occupied fence-stakes in the distance, or walked in the newly opened corn-furrows with a peculiar wagging gait. It was poor soil the farmers were plowing; but it looked fresh, and sent forth a pungent fragrance of broken sassafras roots mixed with that subtle effluence which goes by the name of "outdoors air."

Under the spur of a desire to reach the wooded hills once more, I cast the little meandering road behind me as if I had been unwinding it from a spool. One considerable frame farm-house, flanked

by liberal barns, had a thrifty, generous look.

There was a spring of crystal limestone water bubbling under the hill, down to which a path zigzagged from the kitchen. A milk-house of rough masonry with a mossy roof nestled among willow-trees hard by. This farmstead, however, was the last outpost of generous living and up-to-date comfort. The realm of log cabins and mountain civilization lay beyond. I felt the change when I heard a plowman sing out, "Way hare!" to his lazy horse. The mountaineers all say "Way hare" for "Whoa haw" when driving their teams in the field; and some of them yell out a countrified oath, enforced with a mighty jerk of the single rope that serves as driving-line. You may smile, but to me there is something ineffably comforting and sweet in those bucolic sounds—the lowing of cows, the bleating of sheep, the crowing of cocks, and the "Gee-erp ther'—way hare!" of the lank and honest mountaineer.

Entering the foot-hills, I slackened my pace, looking about for an eligible place

to make my headquarters. I noted with delight that the cabins were far apart, separated by wooded hills and hollows, where a fine vernal tenderness was spreading in many shades of green. In places violets grew so abundantly that the ground looked as if a bit of sky had fallen so hard that the impact had made froth of it; and these spots were sometimes offset by beds of rose-purple claytonias. The road dwindled to a mere desultory cartway, which finally led me to the cabin of one Thomas Shamly, who took me in and entertained me to the best of his ability, giving me a little room on the end of a lean-to veranda to sleep in; and next morning he hitched his little mules to his rickety wagon and hauled me nine miles to the place of Simpson Jarvis, "over on the crick," as Mr. Shamly remarked, "an' ye kin feesh ther' consid'ble." He mistook my bow for a fishing-rod, and yet was not satisfied to rest upon that theory. While we jolted along the dim, stony, root-matted road, he made many indirect attacks upon my reticence; wherefore it pleased me at last to

enlighten him by a practical, not to say spectacular, demonstration. He was a man fashioned with a stoop of the shoulders and a lank body, topped off with a narrow, sandy head, which wore reddish throat-whiskers set on like a thin ruffle or ruche under the chin and jaws. When his little mules came to a ford in a small stream and were afraid to enter, he fell into a rage, stormed at them, belaboring them with a gad. The great noise he made startled a bird from a sand-bar to the left of us, and it flew a little way up the brook, where it dropped down again at the edge of a pool behind some stones.

At the first glimpse I knew it was not a bird usually found in the mountains, and I was so eager to secure it that, with a single compound motion, I slipped three arrows from my bag, flung myself over the sideboard to the ground, and braced my bow. Mr. Shamly was too busy basting his hydrophobic mules—lashing them with his tongue and slashing their backs with the gad—to observe my movement; and when at last the team plunged into

the water scarcely hoof-deep and stopped to drink, none the worse for flogging or fright, I was sneaking in a curve to take cover behind a clump of low bushes. Then I felt Mr. Shamly look at me and heard him say:

"Wall, dern sich a feller! They 's no feesh in this yer crick."

I crept until I could peep around a fringe of the bushes. Yonder stood the bird, a fine, sheeny fellow, well poised on his sturdy legs, showing glints of reddish yellow, brown, black, gray, white, and ash. It was a Canute sandpiper, doubtless a straggler blown there by some wind of accident—a most interesting bird, with an incomplete biography to which I hope in the long run to contribute some facts. Just now I wish to brag of a good shot.

Eighteen yards is a very short range, even for a bow, and at that distance the knot—the common name of our Canute sandpiper—looked strikingly large; in reality its measurements were: length about eleven inches, extent twenty-one inches. It stood on a bit of wet sand beside a rock

at the water's edge, and by certain swaying motions of its neck and body I knew it would fly from the slightest noise. I knelt in order to shoot under some dangling twigs.

"Wall, I jes be dad burn!" commented Mr. Shamly, in the most approving accent, when I let go a blunt arrow, and saw it bowl the game over, knocking it clean from behind the rock into the field of Mr. Shamly's absolutely amazed vision.

"Ef he did n't kill it I 'm er gourd!"

By this time I had crossed the stream at a riffle, and was holding my bird high, gazing upon it triumphantly, as a fisherman does who exalts a two-pound bass and mutters: "Four pounds and a half, if it 's an ounce!" Then Mr. Shamly drove his mules with the clattering and dripping wagon through the stony ford. If possible, he was prouder than I of the successful shot. Throughout the rest of our journey together, he talked volubly; in the main he was telling me about his own prowess with the "bow 'n' arry" when he was a boy. He could hit a bird every time, and

"ez fur squ'ls, they 's my meat jes w'enever I wanted 'em!" By the time we had reached the trail where he was to dump me, Simpson Jarvis's place being over a hill not practicable for a wagon, I was wellnigh convinced that what I knew about archery had been forgotten by Mr. Shamly, and I bade him good-by on the verge of envy.

No sooner was I afoot and alone once more than I heard some bird twitterings, and above all one welcome note. Almost immediately I was in pursuit of a specimen, a blue grosbeak, and the rattling of the Shamly vehicle died away in the distance while I clambered over rocks and bestrode bushes to keep the bird in sight until I could get a shot at it. In my notes the whole grosbeak family would be complete if I should get this one. Your bird-student has his cupidities, and your archer backs them with his tackle. This mixing of ornithology with bow-shooting, however, has its limitations. If I had borne a gun the blue grosbeak would have been mine. As it was I shot five or six shots and did

not touch a feather; but the delight of it still haunts me.

Two miles of a walk over the hill, to avoid a roundabout wagon-drive of thirteen, proved exhilarating. Half the way I soared, by a winding, desultory path, and perched myself on a scarred and splintered rock, where I ate my luncheon of corn-bread and ham. It was a dry, bald spot overlooking a fair valley, deep in the midst of which the little homestead of Mr. Jarvis seemed to slumber while I gazed. Just below me the forest was stunted and thin; but farther down a great show of greenery, with uplifted masses of variegated tree-tops, increased until the little river in the emerald trough could be seen only here and there shining up with great allurement.

When presently I began to swoop down the fell, there came up to meet me a flicker's merry call and the voice of a Baltimore oriole. The breeze, too, seemed puffing fragrantly slantwise toward the sky from out the depth of the valley. Soon enough I was under superb arches of oak,

hickory, and pine, through which blue patches of sky gleamed brilliantly. Going down-hill proved tiring, however, and I was glad to rest on an old log near the verge of a cliff, which dropped almost vertically fifty or more feet, so that I could look with level gaze into tree-tops of immense size. Far below I saw my path sinking like an irregular stairway along the steep. It was a good place for lounging—just breezy enough to soothe, and yet not chill, a place given over to such solitude as the poets rhapsodize about. I hung one leg over the log, and felt too comfortable to be bothered with unbracing my bow. In this attitude I was sitting when a hoarse voice startled me, not with fear or surprise, but with a thrill of joy. It was a long-lost voice, the croak of a raven, and in a moment the great black flash, if I may so call it, shot across a rift, with a fine swish of feathers shimmering blue-green over their intense inky darkness. A raven, and it lit only forty yards away, a trifle above the level of my eyes, on a pine bough close to the tree's bole.

At the first note from that doughty bird I was ready for a shot—over-ready, indeed, with my heart shaking my jerkin and shortening my breath. When you shoot at a raven, let me tell you, you shoot in a hurry; for it has not the habit of posing as a target. Up went my bow and away spun the arrow. Not carelessly, but without hesitation, and certainly in a very fever of desire to slay, I drove that shot, and with perfect aim. There is not a doubt that it would have been a center hit but for an insignificant twig, which turned the pile upward, so that it whacked on a pine-knot, the flintiest of all woods, that projected a foot above the raven's back.

It was meant for tragedy, but the twig made comedy of it. "Quoth the Raven, 'Nevermore!'" My arrow went somersaulting sidewise to some distance, and then fell down, from bough to bough, until at last, clear of the tree-tops, it righted itself feather uppermost, and so reached the path far below, sticking there slantwise in the ground. Memorable to a degree was the glare of instantaneous amazement

which shot from the raven's eyes, while the feathers on its throat stood out separately, and its wings jumped to their work with a thrashing sweep through the foliage. Gone like a sable ghost, or a plumed demon, *Corvus corax* was seen no more, heard no more, during all my stay in the hill-country. Doubting naturalists may suggest to me that it was, after all, only a crow—that the ravens are extinct in the Blue Ridge wilderness; but a raven it is in my notes, a raven it was, a raven it must stand. Maybe the botanists will no more credit me when I state that I found purple lupines on a sandy slant blooming above the violets and claytonias. It was a sunny southeastern slope of warm, light, arenaceous soil, a place for precocious growth. The beautiful pea-like flowers nodded me a welcome. I plucked a fine raceme and stuck it in my cap, not without an impression that such a plume added a certain debonair accent to my make-up, which Mr. Jarvis doubtless observed when he met me at his woodpile just outside the rickety fence in front of his cabin.

He looked at me a moment before he responded to my salute. A queer half-smile faltered in the corners of his tobacco-stained mouth. There was something dry and jocular in his countenance; indeed, the whole man somehow suggested an old leather poke full of desiccated conundrums. His head was a ball of wrinkles; even in his hair the skin showed a corrugated network; and his constricted neck, his hands, his wrists, and his chest, where the faded blue cotton shirt lay open, were of like structure. Out of his narrow, pale-gray eyes came a friendly twinkle.

"Howdy!" he drawled, kicking absently at a chunk of wood. "Wha' 'd ye come f'om, anyhow?" He looked at me askew and chuckled vaguely.

This was a pretty free inquiry, I thought; but these mountaineers have their way; it is always best to be just as breezy to them as they are to you, and long acquaintance with their peculiarities served my turn. I gave Jarvis as good as he sent, not dreaming that he knew me.

"I came from where I was at," I re-

plied, "and I 've got to where I want to be."

He spat sidewise.

"Ya-a-s," he drawled; "hit air not sich a bad place fer yer sort. Kem in, kem in."

"I air pooty nigh as good a sort as you," I responded. "But I 'm thirsty clean down ter my toes."

"Nary drap in the jug," he said with a husky sigh, "an' ain't been fer a week."

"It 's water I want. Is the well dry, too?"

"Got nary well. Spring 's all right. Go down thar; ye 'll find er gourd; help yerself."

He made a motion with his pungled head to indicate the direction, and when I went he followed. After I had filled the parched void in me, he leered and said:

"Ye 've fergot me. 'Member w'en I fiddled at Spivy Fuller's dance, an' ye was so crazy 'bout the little Widder Aikins?"

As if a screen in my brain had been shifted by his words, suddenly I recollected.

"Why, Jarvis, you old fraud! How did you ever get away up here?"

Through the hurly-burly of twenty years I harked back. The fiddling and the shuffling feet sounded amazingly real and near. In an instant I was squeezing Jarvis's hand, and we were grimacing at each other like two embarrassed boys. Meantime I heard him saying:

"An' ye still air a-shootin' the bow 'n' arry! Lawd, I 'r' glad ter see ye!"

He *was* glad to see me; the beam from his countenance and the timbre in his voice could not have been counterfeit. Moreover, Jarvis was not a man to feign delight. Nature's frankness and sincerity were his; likewise her economy of special favors.

And so I abode with him—the withered and queer old bachelor—in his ramshackle cabin beside the little river, through as gay a period as ever rounded itself. By day I had my will of the birds, and of evenings Jarvis fiddled and spilled his dry humor—it was all honey-sweet, a dripping comb of primitive joy.

Many a sojourn like that has been mine,

and every fresh one seems, in the time of it, the best. Down in the Terre Aux Bœufs, years ago, when I outwitted a scarlet flamingo, that red-letter bird of all low-country sportsmen, and bagged it with a fine shot, the arrow stopping it short in air; over on the Rigolets, when I crept upon a great blue heron, under cover of a mere rush-wisp; deep in the Okefinokee; amid the Everglades; on the strange bosom of Okeechobee; beside the darkly lapsing flood of the Kankakee; and in many another bowman's paradise, where I have gathered and garnered, there was something original; but not one spot in lowland or highland, from the Leelanau to the Kissimmee, excelled the region in which Jarvis was master. Here I had freedom in its purest form, and here I breasted the flood-tide of migrating song-birds, while spying upon all the resident species. Let my note-book, with its sketches jotted down on the spot, speak awhile in testimony of what happened.

April 19. Struck the cabin of an ancient Georgian acquaintance here by accident. Fiddler,

droll and peculiar; living alone in cabin of two bare rooms with open passage between. Shoots a flint-lock rifle to perfection. Makes shingles by hand—saws off the cuts, rives them and shaves them without help—ships them on a raft down the river. Happy as a child and strong as an ox.

April 20. First day out from Jarvis's. Got up at daybreak. Coffee and bacon. Walked three miles beside the river, making list of birds. Saw wood-ducks on a back-water pond—breeding in hollow trees near by. Killed a fine specimen of the "least bittern" (*Ardetta exilis*), which I needed to complete a study. A time, indeed, I had with it—an hour's campaign! How many of this species I have taken in the past few years, and still my study is not finished! Jarvis at my heels like a dog.

I give these as examples of notes made of evenings after a day's tramp. Actual field sketches, as I jotted them down, would be scarcely intelligible to the uninitiated reader. It must be easy, however, to catch the spirit of my outing from the hint about the killing of the heron. I recall the whole scene, or series of scenes, with every minute circumstance connected; indeed, I look back and see myself perform, or rather live, the incidents

one by one; and the mountain air fans me, the incipient greenery curtains me about, the fragrance has not weakened, the bird-song is as wild and free as ever.

There is a part of sylvan archery which defies description,—a part almost equal to the whole, in fact,—and just there lies the subtle charm. To shoot a bow, or "in a bow," as the old writers have it, demands next thing to impossibility; you are required to do with absolute exactitude twenty things at once, if the shot is to be good and true; and yet you so frequently approach this perfection that your failures, which are legion, count not at all. In my recorded scores afield there are sometimes thirty misses set down against one hit; yet here and there appears an entry like this: "Crept three hundred yards, sneaking from cover to cover, to get a shot at a hen-hawk. Finally had to take an almost hopeless chance. Hit him just as he lifted his wings to fly. Eighty paces to the root of the tree, where he fell from a bough sixty feet above." But some of the misses, and here I cannot explain, are set

down with as much unction as the hits. The archer shoots for the enjoyment of the shot, perhaps, not for the pleasure of bagging a bird, and he can see his missile, can actually measure its course, from beginning to end of its flight. When the shot clips close to the object aimed at—when the bird leaps aside and glares, or squats flat, or jumps stiff-legged straight up—there is a thrill from the bow-arm to the brain, a shock of delight not to be put into literature.

In the case of the little bittern, just mentioned, there was what tests an archer's training. I found it near the pond in a place where last year's growth of cattail flags covered a bit of bog. It rose and flew twenty or thirty yards, dropping again into cover. The swale was narrow, with solid places here and there on which I could cross, and as nothing in the nature of the ground offered an obstacle to flight-shooting, I determined upon flushing the bird and trying to kill it on the wing. Jarvis, trudging behind me, commented on every detail of my work as it disclosed it-

self, growing more and more intensely critical when I missed shot after shot. Time and again I felt his breath on the back of my neck, so eager was he to give me raucously whispered advice. Usually the bird rose about twenty or thirty yards distant, and was fifteen or twenty feet up when I let drive. Shot at that angle, my heavy, broad-feathered arrows would not go far, and I usually marked each one down and went and got it before shooting again. This wrought upon Jarvis until he was actually quivering with excitement, as almost every shaft appeared to clip so close that daylight was obscured between it and the bird—a simple illusion caused by the rapidity of both flying objects. And when at last the hit was made, he quit all restraint and let himself go into spasmodic antics, yelling meantime, and making comments upon the wonderful nature of my shooting in a voice and with a facial expression droll beyond description.

I was glad to get rid of him presently when he had to return to his work. Your sylvan archer gets on better when absolute

loneliness is the atmosphere he breathes. After the disappearance of Jarvis I felt free to turn myself loose and make a fine stir in Arcadia. The wildest shooting mood was upon me, and whatever moved became a target for my shafts. I am afraid to make a full record of an hour's business; the wood-pewees whined because of my activity, and the crested flycatcher whistled dolefully; but I laughed and shot and made notes. The ozone seemed almost too plentiful in that delicious mountain air.

My stay with Jarvis added a new note to experience, not so much on Jarvis's personal account as through the accidents of time and place. This genial little valley in the wild mountains, with a rivulet—the upper water of a beautiful river—flowing down its center, and bottom-lands bordered with terraced and rock-littered fells on either side, was a roadway over the Blue Ridge, up which, at a leisurely pace, the singing and chirruping bird-migrants wended northward. Every morning I was out early to get the full benefit of their

clashing medleys. Jarvis, finding out (in spite of my best efforts to conceal it) that I preferred solitude to company, cooked a simple breakfast every morning before sunrise and went to his work. I often heard his ax or saw ringing merrily as I crept silently through the woods and copses, or sat at the foot of some noble tree to reflect and make notes. Once he came upon me asleep at noonday, my bow and quiver leaning against the huge bole of a white oak, the buttressed root of which served my head for pillow. His heavy footfalls awoke me, and my first glimpse of him connected him vaguely with a half-remembered fantastic dream of Arcadia, satyrs, and fluting, goatskin-mantled youths. In a word, I had been reading Theocritus, according to an unalterable habit, when slumber shut down upon me. The little dog-eared book was to Jarvis a mystery. He could read, but "thet air do not 'pear like nothin' to me," he said. It was, indeed, Greek to him.

A pirogue, the most skittish craft that ever danced on water, was placed at my

command by Jarvis. In it I made some interesting voyages up and down the stream to study the birds that haunted the banks and water. Nowhere else have I ever seen so many kingfishers. They checkered the air in places with the blue streaks of their flight, and their chuckling cries were almost constantly in my ears. Many wood-ducks, probably the same I saw about the back-water pond, flitted over me, or rose from the pools ahead of me. I was tired of Jarvis's eternal corn-bread and pork, hungry for a snack of game, and so I deliberately broke the rule against spring duck-shooting to the extent of bagging one beautiful pair, or rather two males, of those toothsome birds.

A negro tilled a part of Jarvis's little farm, a patch of ground on each side of the river, which here doubled on itself with a short curve. The land looked very rich, and the part cleared was planted in corn. The ducks, to avoid me, adopted the tactics of swinging around the river's arc; and then, when I came in sight of them, they would cut across the field, flying low,

and drop under the bank of the opposite stretch of the river. So finally I tied my pirogue and went afoot to try creeping. This, on account of a thin brush growth at the edge of the banks, which were in some places steep and high, offered a better chance of success. After an hour and a half of hard but exhilarating work, missing many shots and losing four good arrows, I killed my two birds and bore them in triumph to Jarvis's cabin. Here again I may take a page or two out of my note-book:

Made a fine shot this P.M., killing a wood-duck under the bank diagonally across the river, from where I stood full seventy yards. Had missed eleven shots, and gone miles back and forth, much of the time crawling from one reach of the stream to the other. It actually looked as if I could not do anything but shoot over a bird, or short of it, or to one side or the other. This sort of luck is hard on one's nerves. Found myself bathed in perspiration, mopping my face, as excited as though I had been stalking tigers. The ducks were not very shy at first, but shooting at them soon made them skittish. Killed my first one by an easy plunging shot—plumped a shaft almost straight downward upon its back from a bluff's edge. But

the second one was a memorable prize on account of the circumstances, which I enjoy thinking about and recording while Jarvis snores on his bed in the corner, and the frogs somewhere sing a grating, underground song. I hear the sound of my shot in spite of these noises, a sort of pervading sweet echo, going, as it were, from place to place in my brain, filling me with a savage yet delicate delight. I stood staring at my bird, just discovered under the farther bank of the stream, where it evidently thought itself quite hidden. A ray of sunlight made its variegated side shine like a cluster of gems seen through a latticework of long, dry grass hanging down from the bank. Seventy yards was the range, as I reckoned it instantaneously while drawing the arrow up in the bow. I see now, just as I saw then, all the particulars of the landscape: the little field, the trees and height beyond, the narrow, shallow river lapsing with a gentle swash, the kingfishers streaking the amber air, the drooping scar grass, the wood-duck, and the cool cavern of the bluff beyond it—all that I saw, and yet my vision was focused steadfastly on the bright spot at the butt of the bird's gay wing. And smoothly slipped my shaft across my bow until I was aware of the pile's end resting for the tenth part of a second almost even with the bow's back. "Scutch! siz-z-z! chuff!" The recoil first, the whisper of the feather, a grayish line in the air, a low arch sprung from my eye to the bird, and then a puff of feathers.

These two ducks and one turkey were the only table comforts added by my archery to the mensal comforts of the Jarvis cabin. I bagged the gobbler, with a shot not at all remarkable, from behind a huge tree. He had just made the exclamatory remark, "Pitt! pitt!" when I thumped him over at fifteen yards, his legs actually bent for a spring into the air that very moment. We feasted upon him until his bones were as clean as water-washed plane-tree roots. His wing-feathers I carefully plucked and saved for my arrows.

One day it rained so that going out was not practicable until four in the afternoon. Then the sun burst forth, and the wood shook with the merriest explosion of bird-song far and near. A change in the direction and temperature of the wind was followed by a wonderful apparent intensification of the foliage in color and density of massing. No sooner were the boughs done dripping than I went abroad, not to shoot, but to stray and revel in the freshness. Some of my arrows had their feather-vanes fixed in place with a patent

glue which the dampness of the air dissolved; wherefore, when a squirrel tempted me sorely, lo! a featherless shaft lay across my bow, and my drawing-fingers were sticky with gum arabic. From distance to distance rattled the fine laughter of birds making glee at my discomfiture.

All periods, good and bad, joyous and sorrowful, come to an end. Jarvis had a load of shingles to haul by cart far down the river. He insisted upon having me keep house for him during his considerable absence; but I could not consent. Following a trail northeastward over a mountain-spur, I found the highway—an atrocious pair of ruts winding among the rocky knobs, which would sometime lead me to a railway-station where my trunk and bags were awaiting me. And it was a jolly tramp from cabin to cabin,—not one mountain household turned me away,—a slow and halting wander-week, with side excursions into bird-haunts, and dreamy resting-spells. Spring went apace with me; the dogwood clumps began to flash their white blossoms; fragrance varied and strength-

ened each morning; new wild-flowers sparkled beside the boulders and between the rusty roots of the wayside trees; while even on the highest cliff-fanged mountain-peaks spread a tender film of green.

A short paragraph in my note-book runs thus:

Came to a pine wood thinly set on a level plateau. Heard red-cockaded woodpeckers at work. Went to get a specimen for study. They were high in the pine-tops, mostly hidden. Now and again I tried a shot at one far aloft, and had but the satisfaction of pounding a solid piece of wood or clipping off a green frond. The ground under the trees was lightly covered with pine-needles, and my arrows descending stuck upright, showing their gay feathers here and yonder clearly against the russet background. In the road a little way off a lank mountain-boy sat on his mule astride of a grist-bag—he had been, or was going, to mill—and gazed at me long and vacantly.

Before I reached the town where I was to take the train for home and work, I sat

Upon a lofty peak, amid the clear blue sky,

as Mrs. Hemans said it, and looked down into a wide, fertile, well-tilled valley,

through which flowed that loveliest of mountain rivers, the far-famed French Broad. So clear was the atmosphere that with my glass I could almost see the separate bright leaves on the orchard-trees embowering the cozy farm-houses. The prospect sent up to me something like a shock of civilization, and I felt a breath of man's latest aspirations, while from far away behind me came the fading voice of freedom and the wilderness. I vaguely feared to turn and look back over my shoulder, lest I should be tempted beyond resistance and retreat before the countenance of thrift and traffic.

But down the airy slope I featly trod, soon reaching a genuine public highway, smooth and broad, with beautiful fields rolling off on either side in gentle billows of rich brown soil, over which the plows and harrows were trailing their sketchy lines, loosing an opulence of earthy odors sweet as blossom-breath to my nostrils. Meadow-larks sang, in clear, lonesome tones, a haunting snatch which might have been blown, as "sweet sleep" was blown,

from the "lonesome-sounding reeds" (ἐρημαίοις καλάμοις) of the unknown Greek poet. Then a long railway-train, with great billows of black smoke above it, hove in sight, coming around a mountain's knee to rush howling across the river into the village beyond a wooded ridge.

Not yet quite ended, however, was my archer's outing; its spirit flared up brightly once again before guttering and winking out. Where the road crossed a brook, I stood for a few minutes leaning on the wooden rail of the bridge, idly watching some minnows at play in the clear swirls below. Always nature offers temptations; a new charm, never exactly felt before, comes with every fresh combination. A little aquatic bird—you may certainly know the difference between water species and land species by their motions—flew under the bridge and passed on, just above the brook's current. A moment later another followed, and both neatly curved their line of movement to coincide with the stream, soon passing out of sight behind some bushes. It was compulsion; I could

not even try to resist; and without fixed purpose I sprang down from the bridge and gave chase, not to the birds themselves,—the pursuit was of two shimmering phantoms, and they lured me on and on,—not with any particular desire to shoot, but only to go up the stream, away from the road, into a new, untrodden place, where something indescribable, yet very real, something I liked beyond expression, lingered and wavered and shone.

I had proceeded up the way of the brook not more than two hundred yards, when I saw my two birds side by side on a little spit in the middle of the current. They were odd-looking forms—small bodies on long, stiffly set legs. Under them in the water stood inverted duplicates, and behind them sparkled the wavy reach of clear brook-bosom, which seemed to impart its tricksy motion to their wings and necks. These aquatic birds certainly have peculiarities like those of water; the kinship of life and its habitat is one of nature's open secrets.

Instantly my dreamy spell dissolved, as

ice in fire; up went my bow and away sped the arrow. It was preposterous to expect a hit at that distance, but your archer always expects a hit; nor is his disappointment great when expectation ends as it ended then. For he has learned the sweet truth of that ancient saw: "Pursuit is more enjoyable than possession." One of the birds saw me getting ready to shoot, and flew. The other one, however, stood its ground, acting as if it spied something in the water that it meant to get. The distance was so great that I could not be sure; but I could have enthusiastically deposed that the shaft struck exactly between that doddler's feet in the sand. Certainly it knocked some pebbles hither and yon. And the bird was so scared by the stroke that, instead of flying, it lifted its wings, and, as it seemed to me, with its feathers all on end and its beak wide open, stared at the firmly planted missile as at an apparition astonishing beyond endurance. Then it sprang into the air and zigzagged crazily away.

A sparrow-hawk next got my attention

by wheeling around overhead, letting fall upon me a bickering shower of keen notes. When it lit upon a tall dead tree, I shot at it from behind a clump of pussy-willows. The sound of my bow, although very slight, startled it, and it came near flying in the way of an arrow far out of line. Every once in a while a bird actually thus assists a poor shot, and bags itself, so to say. I followed the little hawk from tree to tree, shooting at hopelessly long range, only to see the arrows fly, and to hear the long sighing note of the feathers swiftly diminish in the distance. It was leisurely exercise, suited to the cool yet sunny and dreamy weather.

I walked across some freshly plowed ground, where the young maize was out, twi-leaved and emerald-bright, in clusters of from two to five plants, in hills about three and a half feet apart. The tilth was fine, my boots sinking into it ankle-deep. Here I saw my first bluebirds of the season fluttering from stump to stump—the field had been recently cleared of a forest—and blowing their tender flute-phrases.

Then I entered a piece of wooded pasture-land where the cows seemed to be finding food, although I saw little grass. Flickers darted up from the ground here and yonder, bounding away through the air, their line of flight showing a series of long undulations; and each bird whacked the bole of a tree and stuck there, a sheeny spot of brown and gold speckled with black.

I would not have wantonly killed one of those beautiful creatures for any price; but I shot at them from afar, just to drop an arrow somewhere close enough to them to startle them. At a hundred yards I could do this; and once it looked for a moment as if a miracle of accuracy or accident were to be compassed; for the shaft, flying beautifully, went curving over with such steadiness, and in a line so marvelously true, that when it approached the bird I felt a compunction dart through my mind. I thought it a center shot until it struck. The flicker was a good hundred yards distant from me, and I could make it out only by its movements while peck-

ing for grubs. The arrow appeared actually to fall upon it, but it was a miss. The leaves and dirt were flung up by the shaft's pile, and out of the little dust-jet rose the flicker like a spurt of dull flame. It was almost a duplicate of the shot at the doddler. I felt not a little relieved, glad that I had missed, but proud of the shot. And that was the closing incident of a memorable outing. A few minutes later I was again in the highway, briskly tramping toward the station, and that night I slept while rushing homeward at the rate of sixty miles an hour.

Under a Dogwood with Montaigne

He puts his foot into heresies tenderly, as a cat in water, and pulls it out again, and still something unanswered delays him.—JOHN EARLE.

GENIUS is the true fountain of youth. We who but touch it with finger-tips at utmost stretch feel its renewing thrill come to our centers of enjoyment, a sort of electrical shock from an exhaustless storage battery, centuries distant it may be, set in the world by divine wisdom or divine accident. Once or twice in an age comes a man or a woman who has this perennial gift, this ageless influence, and imbues a book with it. One of the best-endowed of these was Michel, Seigneur de Montaigne, who in 1580 gave to the printer and to immortality the celebrated

"Essais," or rather the first two volumes, followed eight years later by the complete edition.

Montaigne died on September 13, 1592. Since then there has been scarcely a moment free of the busy scratching of a pen setting down comment, criticism, notes, or polemical attack, with the "Essais" for their distinguished target; and it is, perhaps, the highest compliment to Montaigne's genius that we can truthfully say nothing unpleasant about these moths as they dance lightly or sluggishly in the fascinating light of a flame so fickle and yet so strong.

Yesterday I had an armful of books beside me in a fragrant woodland nook under a dogwood-tree. Overhead the white flowers and green leaves made a tent-roof of comforting quality, while I read and considered, the birds meantime dashing down upon me a desultory shower of chirps, twitters, squeaks, and song-fragments. Whenever I lifted my eyes a wing sparkled near or far. Sand-lilies shook their delicate bells between the tufts of wood-grass.

From a Royal Street second-hand bookstall I had brought a large one-volume copy of "Essais de Michel de Montaigne" (1854). The pages were exquisitely mildewed, and some former owner, probably a priest, had marked and annotated many passages not especially orthodox. Three or four other books, all of them about Montaigne, made up the pile, the latest in date being "Michel de Montaigne: A Biographical Study. By M. E. Lowndes." A book of genuine interest. Is it Miss, Mrs. or Mr. Lowndes? I do not know; but a womanly literary note predominates on every page, wherefore I risk the feminine pronoun in acknowledging my indebtedness. It is a book densely packed with well-digested information culled from widely scattered and, not infrequently, unexpected sources. To be sure, what the French admirers of Montaigne had left for any newcomer to pick at in the way of original investigation was scarcely worth searching after; but what this author has done will be pleasantly acceptable to English readers. She has brought to-

gether in small compass everything that is of real importance, so far as discovery has gone, to the proper understanding of the "Essais." She has condensed the works of M. Payen and the indefatigable antiquarians of Bordeaux, comparing them with those of Galy, Brunet, Dezeimeris, Malvazin, and Beuther, and she has searched the history of Montaigne's time and country with intelligence to get the aid of its light. This beam of illumination made up of rays from many bits of history is, indeed, the best part of her book, and it will be appreciated by every student.

The strictly critical part, which is somewhat piecemeal in its presentation, being sandwiched between the historical and the biographical facts, is perhaps the least valuable in the book; not that it lacks the interest of scholarly and thorough breadth, acumen, and wisdom, but in the main there is nothing new. Nor is the literary style especially attractive. It is dry; the thread of the diction kinks itself; we come upon no charming surprises of phrase. It is all clear enough, sound enough, as com-

position; but it has few distinguishing claims as literature. At the end of the book there are more than fifty pages of notes embracing a large amount of matter highly valuable to those who have not access to the works from which it is taken. These notes are mostly in French, or refer to French books, and they will be found a good guide to the general reader, as well as to the special student of Montaigne literature.

The author gently criticizes Emerson for ranking Montaigne with representative men, or rather objects to the "American looseness of terminology" by the use of which Emerson failed to make clear just what he meant by the word "representative"; and she goes on to say that Montaigne "was of that order of mind which, however readily active in response to external stimulus, is wanting in the inner springs of action, and having neither the coördinating nor the volitional impulse, is content to accept the world fragmentarily, as it is presented in experience, and seeks neither to remold it in actuality to an

ideal, nor to reduce it to a unity in thought." In a word, like most critics who have tried to make more or less of Montaigne than what he made of himself, she has failed outright beyond the success of mere theorizing. But she has not failed in the main aim of her book. Her study of Montaigne's atmosphere and surroundings is masterly. She shows us the historical entourage of the "Essais" as no other single writer has done, and opens up with admirable brevity of diction the local mines of influence which made the innate ephectic temper of Montaigne so effective in dealing with the incongruous materials that he molded into amorphous yet immortal creation, high perched in his circular tower-room the while. True lovers of the old Périgord sage will be grateful for this book, glad to discuss it with all good library-worms who hold to the doctrine that "il ne fault pas attacher le sçavoir à l'ame, il l'y fault incorporer; il l'en fault pas arrouser, il l'en fault teindre" ("knowledge must not be tacked upon the mind, it must be blended in its substance; it

must not merely sprinkle it, but must dye it"). And in spite of the author's judgment to the contrary, such a company will easily class Montaigne with the divine logolepts who "se detournent de leur voye un quart de lieue pour courir apres un beau mot." It is only when the thought-harrier and the chaser after fine words coalesce that we have a great literary man.

In the best sense Montaigne was a great literary man—the greatest, perhaps, whose writings depend little or not at all upon a recognized form of art for their charm. He had art and was thoroughly conscious of its value; but it was formless. His originality took no systematic turn, acknowledged no plan established by man or Muse; yet he was, in his way, as original as Homer. In coming to his work by a fine accident of genius, stumbling upon it in a garret, as it were, he felt and imparted the delicious surprise of a child suddenly set down amid an endless confusion of toys. He caught up style; but where did he find it? Did he absorb it in the French

capital, whence poets, artists, philosophers, wits, have always brought away a literary honey-bag ready to burst with good things? Certainly no Frenchman was ever "Frenchier" than he; but his boast was that he cared little for urban life, and the "Essais" have a rural, often a rustic, flavor, as if prepared and dried by the recipe our great-grandmothers used in preserving simple herbs.

Paris was a filthy and muddy little city in Montaigne's day, quite distasteful to him, as it was to Ronsard and other literary notables. In fact, there could be no peaceful and thoughtful rest within its walls. The area was entirely given over to violent intrigue and sudden calamities. Montaigne went there once in a while, to keep in touch with court life, staying but a few days, then hustling back to his estate and his goose-quill. Presumably he collected books during these visits. The air was sweet with the bouquet of fresh lyrics blown in from all quarters of France. He must have known the rich, Hellenic smack of La Belle Cordière's

verses, of Olivier de Magny's odes, and of Jacques Tahureau's rhymes. He tasted whatever offered, plucked everybody's flowers, charged his diction with the choicest words from all the active literary laboratories. Ronsard, Amyot (if he may be listed here), D'Aubigné, Du Bartas, and a whole swarm of humming-bees filled his ears with honey-sweet word-cadences, melodies, harmonies, which he artfully affected to snub and refuse.

But you can never be sure when he is snubbing, so lightly he skips from one mood to another. What he seems averse to to-day he makes eyes at to-morrow—a sort of fickleness which gives his pages just the flickering, uncertain light of authentic human nature.

It seems to me [he rather casually remarks] that poetry has had its turn in our time; we have an abundance of good craftsmen in that calling: Aurat [Daurat], Bèze, Buchanan, l'Hospital, Mont-Doré, Turnebus. As to the French, I think that they have risen to the highest possible mark; and where Ronsard and Du Bellay are at their best, I do not find them far removed from classical perfection.

But clearly these Frenchmen did not greatly interest him.

It is always appetizing to have a great writer's opinion of his own style, and Montaigne, disingenuously, I think, remarks that he sees no reason why it is any more out of taste for a writer to describe himself than for a painter to make a portrait of himself. "I have naturally a jocund and intimate style," he says; "but its form is my own." More than once he frankly confesses his heterogeneous, indistinguishable, and incalculable literary pilferings. He made his booty lawful property by the bee's process of honey-distilling; that is, by passing it through himself and giving it his personal flavor. He was aware of the inevitable modification of knowledge, or science, by the individual nature that absorbed it.

C'est une bonne drogue que la science; mais nulle drogue n'est assez forte pour se preserver sans alteration et corruption selon le vice du vase qui l'estuye. (Science is a good drug; but no drug is strong enough to preserve itself from alteration and corruption by a fault of the vessel holding it.)

The *gaie science* of the troubadours, still madly pursued amid wars and plagues, was no exception; he partook of it and sophisticated it with the essence of Montaigne.

It is but carping to deny a man's originality by going a-nosing far along the days, years, centuries behind him, sniffing for a scent of something remotely similar to his work. Theocritus invented the pastoral, Montaigne invented the essay, Villon invented the personal ballad. Doubtless Montaigne had in his library many a book of disquisitions like Cicero's, of causeries like those of Aulus Gellius, and goodly editions of classics by Henri Estienne; but in none of these was there a model for him. Villon's enormous frankness may have captivated him. I can imagine with what unctuous and grim satisfaction a man like Montaigne would read "Regrets de la belle Heaulmière," "Ballade des pendus," and even the doubtful "Les repues franches"; for he had a taste quickly attracted by human depravity unblushingly confessed. Yet the amorphous beauty of his "Essais" was,

as he sincerely boasted, unquestionably his own invention.

Clément Marot's edition of Villon, published in 1533, was probably on one of Montaigne's five circular shelves side by side with the pretty "L'adolescence Clémentine." At all events, there is a strong suggestion of Villon's literary characteristics in the "Essais." The "Testaments" of Villon should be studied while reading Montaigne; their splendid jargon furnishes many a glimpse deep into his spiritual lair, and opens up riches lying between his words. But there was really no personal resemblance between the rascally poet and the highly honest and honorable essayist. What seems to me to appear, upon comparison, is a kinship based deep in literary egotism. Certain it is that if Montaigne had committed low crimes and high crimes, no matter what their nature, he would have promptly confessed and patiently described them in his "Essais," as Villon had done a century before in his poems regarding his troubles connected with burglaries, robberies, murder, and the like.

Montaigne's literary invention opened the way for the modern prose-essayists. We need not deny Sainte-Beuve's originality when we point out his indebtedness to the "Essais"; indeed, it would be hard to find a great writer since the beginning of the seventeenth century who has not been under literary obligations dating back to Montaigne and sealed with his delightful mastery of diction. Florio's translation of the "Essais" appeared in England in 1603, and if the autographs in the British Museum are genuine, we know that Shakspere and Ben Jonson each possessed a copy. It is the best English translation, albeit by no means satisfactory. Florio was an Italian, born in London, who became a teacher of French and Italian at Oxford, and most of the faults in his Montaigne are clearly due to haste; some of them seem not so easily accounted for; but upon the whole it is a most delightful rendering. We need a thoroughly good modern translation, however, to bring the "Essais" within the understanding of our times, when books are read at a run.

We could have an accurate one, with the English reading up to date in composition and spelling, punctuation and diction. Much depends upon the wisest choice of words to make Montaigne's subtle meanings clear. In the French text there is no excuse for blundering; the style, once you have the key, gives a light, each word a glow-worm, a firefly, showing its deepest significance with a flash. The old French is a trifle difficult in its spelling, at first; so a few of Montaigne's words, long ago modified or abandoned, call for the reader's patience: but very soon all trouble is banished; then who would have a single phrase altered?

One of the most interesting things in connection with the study of Montaigne is that none of the critics has been able to make head or tail of his philosophy; yet all of them avow that he was a great philosopher. Emerson and Walter Pater have given us their utmost of acumen and expression in the effort to do the impossible. Pater, in his chapter on Montaigne in "Gaston de Latour," almost surpasses

himself with deliciously spiced and cunningly brewed appreciation; but "suspended judgment" discloses no philosophy —it is but a beaker of literary bragget. Emerson's "Montaigne; or, The Skeptic," is a fine, trenchant literary review, inimitably rich in phrases and sentences choicely descriptive of Montaigne's style and mental vigor. It is a model, in its way, of literary substance made heavy with a fragrant sap of genius; but where does Montaigne's philosophy come in?

Yet these two papers—Emerson's and Pater's—in different ways expose with charming effect the splendid inner core of Montaigne's literary gift to the world. Here we are enlightened and helped. Montaigne was not a philosopher, for suspended judgment is not philosophy; no more is mere impartial skepticism. He was a belletrist with a superb capacity for saying just what he thought, and with an incomparable genius for thinking the most engaging, the most enticing, the most amazingly acicular, and, alas! often the most disgusting things in the world.

He could have come dangerously near making a silk purse out of a sow's ear; but, to his immortal credit, he did not try to do it. What he said he said with absolute mastery of verbal art; but he obscured no meaning with a mist of fascinating diction. The worst and the best of his thoughts are taken at a glance; they stand out from the page like jeweled bosses on a shield, or like repellent gargoyles on a medieval building.

Still, Montaigne has tremendously affected the world's attitude in the seat of philosophy. His chat was a skirmish-fire by which a great battle was opened. He knew his place, moreover, and fairly estimated the character of his work. In the frankest mood he laid bare the inmost peculiarities of his own mind. He called himself "un philosophe impremedite et fortuite" ("an unpremeditated and haphazard philosopher"), which is a self-definition quite as satisfactory as his system of skeptical analysis. We find him ready with a doubt on most subjects of supreme moment; but the story of the halcyon's

nest strikes him as true beyond cavil. Indeed, he is delightfully contradictory. In his preface he says: "C'est moy que je peins," and "Je suis moymesme la matiere de mon livre." ("It is myself that I depict." "I am the substance of my book.") This he reiterates many times; but three fourths of his matter relates to what is very far from himself.

Montaigne's literature is Shakspere's in the raw materials: the wisdom, the folly, the greatness, the littleness, the coarseness, the amenities, the seriousness, the humor, the ineptitudes, the irony of life—everything is in the literary hash; but all is prose monologue, Montaigne loquitur. He was not tragic, however; but deep under his placid indifference lay the abysses of human fate, and into them he let fall, with an air of playfulness, many a searching plummet that struck bottom. "Je n'enseigne point; je raconte" ("I do not teach; I tell"), he says, quite without reference to what our modern realists boast of. No burden of "moral purpose" was offered as an ex-

cuse for dabbling in every puddle, clean or filthy, to which his feet happened to stray.

For the most part, the "Essais" are good reading in the open air under a tree. A fresh woodland place suits them, a place where vegetable mold and sprouting wild bulbs give forth an Arcadian smack of originality not altogether satisfying, yet charmingly primeval. A purple-flowered pitcher-plant close by me, the dogwood-blossoms overhead, and a faint smell of deer-tongue plantain went well with a passage like this in Book III, Chapter VII: "When I think of growing, it is humbly, with a retarded and timid progress." Or with this: "I should probably like better to be second or third in Périgord than first in Paris." Or this: "I have such a shy soul that I do not reckon good fortune by its height, but by its accessibility." Yonder wood-thrush, peering into a wisp of foliage and starting back again and again, has the same spirit. Montaigne took what offered least resistance.

We naturally look into the "Essais" ex-

pecting to find there the solitary man's love of nature; but Montaigne's curiosity was about humanity. He brooded over the records and vestiges, tracking traits and taking character unawares. An inveterate closet student, not a scholar, a lover of books and book-lore, there is not in all literature a more engaging pedant, nor is there a more enticing bit of description than his light and free sketch of the room in which he studied and wrote. It was a high place, on the third floor of a tower, overlooking a wide landscape. Below was the main entrance to the château; the garden and the courtyard were in view, as well as nearly every part of the house; and he took great delight in the situation on account of the difficulty of climbing up to it. Speaking of the library, he said: "There I pass most of my days; there most hours of every day."

He speaks of books as his most faithful friends, and he had many: five rows of shelves all around the circular room—which was sixteen paces in diameter—were filled with them. The wall had but

one open space, which was just large enough for his desk and chair. "There," he says, "I turn the leaves of this book or that, leisurely, without system or design. Sometimes I reflect, walking to and fro, and dictate and record my dreams, which here you see."

Opening on the library was a little anteroom just large enough for a fireplace, pleasantly lighted, a cozy nook for a study in winter; but Montaigne liked warming his mind, as well as his body, with walking. He thought of building a gallery or veranda to his study, as he regarded every retired place incomplete without a promenade; but he dreaded the trouble of constructing it. "My thoughts sleep if I seat them," he remarks; "my wit will not budge if my legs do not shake it up."

The tower was a windy place in winter; for the château, as the name Montaigne implies, was on a considerable eminence, not far from Bordeaux, of which city Montaigne was for some time mayor. But he preferred his round room to Paris, even. He called it his seat—his "throne," Florio

adds. It was the one place wherein he was absolute lord, and over which he ruled exclusively. Neither wife nor children dared enter without his permission.

Miserable, to my mind, is he who has no place of his own, where he may be solitary, where he may court himself or hide.

He declared that books afforded him recreation, pastime, sport.

If any person says to me that it is abasing the Muses to use them only for play and pastime, he does not know, as do I, how much pleasure, play, and pastime are worth; I had well-nigh said all other aims are ridiculous. I live from one day to another, and, speaking reverently, I live but for myself; my purposes end there. When young I studied for show; then to cultivate myself; now to amuse myself; never for acquirement. I had a vain and unbridled taste for that sort of goods, not only to serve my turn, but, somewhat beyond that, to adorn and polish myself; I have, to a degree, given it up. Books have many pleasing qualities to those who know how to choose them; but there is no sweet without its bitter. It is a pleasure no more pure and perfect than others; it has its drawbacks—very strong ones. The mind is exercised, but the body, of which I have not forgotten the care, rests meanwhile inactive, shrinks, and

becomes pitiful. I do not know an excess more injurious to me or more to be avoided in my declining years.

I never read that passage without seeing the writer before me; I can identify him, even to the sedentary sag at the elbows of his perfumed jerkin, and the introverted expression of his eyes. No wonder that he refused to go down to Bordeaux when he was mayor and a pestilence was there! He wrote a letter instead, for writing was his strong point, and told the people that he thought it scarcely prudent for him to leave the salubrious air of his hilltop study and plunge down into a stratum of plague-stench! Cholera or what not, he remained where he was, dallying between the ham and the bottle, for the lasting delight of us all.

No man cared less for office than he, no man more for himself. This self-interest was not petty selfishness, for he was singularly liberal and beloved by everybody. He was an invalid fighting a distressful disease, growing old in middle life; and

he had the "Essais" to write. "La gloire et le repos sont choses qui ne peuvent loger en même giste." ("Glory and tranquillity are things which cannot lodge in the same room.") What he most desired was tranquillity. "Il fault faire comme les animaux qui effacent la trace a la porte de leur taniere." ("One must do as the animals that leave no track at the entrance of their cave.") So he shut himself up with his books and his art, determined to be true to himself as an organism, and to write just what he thought, having for his aim a style exactly the opposite of what the "precious" school were doing. "Je naturaliserois l'art, autant comme ils artilisent la nature." ("I would naturalize art as much as they artilize nature.") He more than did it; he overdid it, as realists of great force seem bound to do, even Shakspere not excepted.

What was frank and unconscious idealism in Greek art becomes brutal naturalism when one takes it for a model. Montaigne had a motto which he formulated thus: "Our life is part folly, part

wisdom; and he that writes of it but reverently and nicely lets go the better half of it." That is very true; the trouble, however, comes later, when this so-called "better part" crowds out everything else and makes life appear all folly or worse. Even in mere literature, written for the sake of verbal art and the turning of elegant phrases, this thing, which begins as but the "recognition of evil," has a way of expanding and opening until it swallows up every other perception of life. It is as Montaigne says of the lackey: "Give him the privilege of speaking for you, and he is not clever in the least if he does n't usurp your place and give you his."

He says: "My nature chooses my language for me"; but his nature had been domesticated by the strong force of eduction. The wild beast in him showed itself only in the way he had of playing with a subject, as a cat with a mouse, before he fell upon it tooth and claw to make a meal of it. Every reader must envy him his unbroken leisure, which enabled him to work without taking account of

time, and to reckon without a view to money. His literature grew by the labor of love; and he grudged every moment filched from it by eating and sleeping. "Whoever could dine on the smoke of a roast would make a pretty saving." He dined upon the effluence of books. Even when he traveled he carried a library with him, content without reading if he knew that a volume was always within reach, like a friend asleep, to be made entertaining by a touch.

Montaigne speaks of an ancient rhetorician who boasted that it was his business to shuffle small things so as to make them appear important, an art not despised by the philosopher of Périgord himself when he felt his brain running dry and his Latin sources of quotation in danger of exhaustion. Indeed, the business of decking out trifles in the laces and ruffles designed by a clever phrase-maker can still command its admirers and its devoted practitioners. It was not Montaigne's petty facilities, however, nor yet his graceful attention to unimportant things, that fixed him forever

in the world's attention. He was the earliest essayist, and he is still the first. Plato's poetical and dream-shot diction did not materialize, and Aristotle's style was devoid of charm; moreover, the Greek mind was too busy with sensuosities and the delights of physical life to waste precious time in leisurely and studious thought. Even in the book-burdened Alexandrian days, when every educated Greek thought himself a critic, nothing closely like a true essay was written.

The Romans had a clearer comprehension of practical life, as we moderns accept it, than their Hellenic art masters, which should make us expect from Cicero better essays than he wrote. He had style, a clear head, and wide knowledge; but a piece of literature like the "Somnium Scipionis," the "De Amicitia," or the "De Senectute" fails to be satisfactory to us in comparison with what Montaigne and Addison, or even Carlyle and De Quincey, have given us, not to mention Lamb. The Greeks were jocund, but they lacked humor of the sort which distinguishes the

genius of essay; and the Romans, as is best seen in Horace, were ironical and satirical rather than humorously clever. In a word, ancient humor, like that of our greatest American genius, Poe, was apt to choose a grotesque expression. Sometimes a most serious Greek mood hits the modern mind with a dull stroke; as, for example, in this epitaph by Simonides:

> Κρὴς γενεὰν Βρόταχος Γορτύνιος ἐνθάδε κεῖμαι
> Οὐ κατὰ τουτ' ἐλθών, ἀλλὰ κατ' ἐμπορίαν.

I, Brotachus from Gortyna, here lie; but I came here not to be buried, only to trade!

Upon the whole, it seems to be a pretty good joke on the merchant that he got into the ground instead of a trade.

Montaigne's father educated him in perhaps the best possible way to make an essayist of him; and he was a lifelong student, with the wonder of literary suggestion continually exploding in his mind, even at times when the world around him spun madly in the throes of pestilence, political dissolution, and

indiscriminate warfare. His method of composition, however, indicates a natural origin in his peculiarities of character and a development by reason of close and curious self-study. The entire man is in his work, stalking about unreservedly, naked or clothed, as the chance caught him, at many points too frankly natural; in this regard very like and very unlike the Greek masters, notably Theocritus. Emerson says:

> Montaigne is the frankest and honestest of all writers. His French freedom runs into grossness; but he has anticipated all censure by the bounty of his own confessions.

This was a part of his method, a sort of pleading guilty with a most fascinating tumble upon the mercy of the court. Guile it was, but the air of it how guileless! He was a perfect diplomat. His château stood ostentatiously open and unguarded during a time of pillage and protracted lawlessness, he being a privileged person on account of his clever suavity and a

knack of being all things to all men. But Emerson is true when he further says:

> The sincerity and marrow of the man reaches to his sentences.

I cannot feel satisfied with Emerson's singular verb with a double nominative; but Montaigne's words certainly are "vascular and alive."

It is a chief ingredient of the essay, this contradiction of truths, this collision of amenities, by which a fine patchwork grows from page to page; and the writer must know how to make uncomplementary colors blend at the lines of contact with a striking appearance of sympathy in their discord. Montaigne's sincerity was almost excessively cunning, likewise his self-depreciation; yet in the outcome he invariably seems to have pulled the wool off our eyes instead of over them. His personal note never fails to please, even when the burden of his words is grievous to our sense of sight, taste, smell, or to the deeper consciousness of propriety. He

was a Diogenes in a golden tub, not in the least disheveled or absent-minded, well aware of his own indecencies, while recording those of the passing crowd; but to every individual he sped the catchword of irresistible human sympathy, and his voice and countenance were supremely winning.

There is a marked dramatic element in the genuine essay; the writer stands as the actor, and at best advantage when apparently forgetful of his art, doing wonders as if by the happy accident of temperament and conditions. Montaigne talked to his literary ego with an air of one meeting a charming stranger on a long stage-coach journey; then he annotated what he said, and interpolated it with passages, more or less apropos, from the ancient poets, mostly Latin. His recipe does not vary: his beginnings are all alike; his style-texture neither degenerates nor improves; on to the end, like a fine animal running by scent after its prey, he doubles and circles and digresses, yet keeps the track, meantime mouthing delightfully.

The pursuit is really more satisfactory than the killing, in that the actor seems less conscious of himself *currente calamo* than when he stops to jab at a conclusion that must be impaled.

Indeed, the essay is not best troubled with a bulb at its end; nor do statements obviously *ex cathedra* suit its main need, which is disclosure rather than demonstration. Montaigne opened a subject, as lightning opens a cloud, by frequent and forceful illumination from within, while running all through it. He had system, but not regularity nor order; for is not artistic disorder an organic law of the essay? The art which plays hide-and-go-seek with its subject tantalizes us to the last refinement. Montaigne knew the trick of it. "Le vray champ et subiect de l'imposture sont les choses incogneues," he says, in his quaint old French; and he was a master of jugglery with recondite scraps.

A considerable part of his recipe consisted of his own experience, which he used to illustrate and also to decorate

what he had to say about matters distantly remote from both his time and his field of actual knowledge. He would piece together scraps of ancient history and biography, interspersed with gores and gussets and borders of autopersonality delightfully unreserved, a method which leads the reader a merry dance back and forth between B.C. 500 and A.D. 1570, or thereabout. And his ostentatious erudition is absolutely neutralized by this fine, gentle, and unassuming personal element appearing and reappearing so opportunely.

The nineteenth chapter of Book I of the "Essais" may be taken as a shining example of Montaigne's method. It was written before he had become a professional essayist, and the amateur's enthusiasm runs through it like a live wire from phrase to phrase. Death had never before been so politely flattered or so jocundly snubbed; nor to this day has any writer driven a pen deeper into the core of life as the sanest biologists now understand it. As usual, he was right and he was wrong in pretty even measures; but how facile,

how candid, how punctiliously suave and literary! What one poet had said challenged his diligence to find usable verses by a dozen more. His philosophy seems to step from quotation to quotation in crossing dangerous rapids; nor does it matter with him how contradictory or morally repugnant his excerpts may appear; his turn is served by the nicety with which they are made to range themselves in the intervals so as to hold him up out of his own eddies and riffles.

Montaigne talked with his pen instead of his tongue, as Emerson intimates, yet he was vigilantly mindful of his diction; he made literature, and it was bookish, lamp-smoked literature, smelling of old tomes and fringed with cobwebs. Take away from the "Essais" what conscious and patient literary craftsmanship put into them and they will be grievously shredded.

It is a very scant and defective biography that can be constructed from what the "Essais" tell of Michel de Montaigne's life. The result is scarcely better when we attempt to set up his philosophy. Like

Emerson in our day, he uttered pithy and immensely suggestive sentences, sometimes not particularly related one to another. His reader finds almost every page curiously entertaining and fertilizing—a mixture of boldness and timidity, unquestionably human, often exasperatingly frank where reserve would be beautiful, and reserved where caution seems cowardice.

Montaigne was not a coward: judged by the whole body of his writings, far from it; no man of his time was bolder, and, to my understanding, he greatly overstates the case of his selfishness. "I master and consider nothing but myself," he remarked, and "Si j'en prenois qui me guidast, ma mesure pourroit faillir a la sienne" ("If I should take a guide, my measure would not be his"); and yet, while asserting selfishness and insisting that he mentions others only to exhibit himself, he leaves the impression of a free-hearted, kindly, and just man. He says, "I cannot hold a grudge," and that he was incapable of very violent feelings; he despises a liar, avoids maudlin people, and

lives " de la seule assistance de personnes saines et gayes " (" with but the help of the healthy and the blithe "). He belongs with " natures belles et forte," the " solid and fine." " History is my pursuit " (" mon gibier "), " and poetry I like with a natural bent." He has little to say of the best contemporary poetry, however, apparently preferring Étienne de la Boétie to all the melodious innovators of his day. Of Ronsard and Du Bellay he speaks casually, with respectful indifference, saying that " they have done credit to our French poetry "! And when he speaks of the " rich descriptions of one and the delicate inventions of the other," there lies between his lines a subtle criticism of the classical innovations of the " Pléiade." " Il en est de si sots, qu'ils se destournent de leur voye un quart de lieue pour courir aprez un beau mot! " (" Certain fools will go half a league out of the way to run after a fine word! ") We can but wonder what he would have said of Gautier, Baudelaire, Guy de Maupassant, not to mention English and American logolepts of our day.

Recently there has been much said, even by college men, against classical study. Not an original word has been offered, however, for Montaigne said everything that there was to say on that side. The next time that Dr. Andrews prepares a paper on "practical education," let him quote, with some wise evasions, Chapter XXV of the first book, Montaigne's cleverly keen puncturing of academic windbags. But here again our philosopher, "unpremeditated and haphazard," contradicts himself by sowing Latin quotations and classical allusions with the whole bag. Indeed, what would be left of him were his debt to Greek and Latin subtracted from his literary capital? Hear him at another time when in a different mood:

"Je suis degousté de la nouvelleté, quelque visage qu'elle porte." ("I am disgusted with novelty, whatever its visage.") He stands up for old laws, old customs, old books (see Book I, Chapter XXII), and is a strong advocate of old-time standards of action. Plutarch and Seneca were his favorite authors; but he divides

allusions pretty evenly between Plato and Aristotle.

It has been frequently said that Montaigne almost invented the modern method of science study. I think that any careful reader will go to the length of observing that he anticipated Fröbel. His philosophy of education, reduced to its best terms, means just what Fröbel's does; and our eloquent Colonel Ingersoll is indebted to him for the broad and enlightened suggestion that the rod as an educator is a brutal teacher. "Je n'ay veu aultre effect aux verges, sinon de rendre les ames plus lasches, ou plus malicieusement opiniastre." ("I have seen no other effect of rods than to render spirits more careless, or more atrociously obstinate.")

We are told that the late Lord Tennyson was averse to explaining his poetry, but was rather glad to leave it for other imaginations to read into it the utmost possible riches of beauty and splendor. It was Montaigne who remarked, three hundred years ago, that "an observant reader often sees more in an author's writings

than the author ever dreamed of saying"; then he adds that a look and a sense of greater richness is somehow given them; which reminds us of our erudite Browning commentators and our Whitman enthusiasts. As for Montaigne himself, one has but to read his essay on pedants (Book I, Chapter XXIV) to see that he understands the trick of which he complains; indeed, he openly winks at his own pedantry, and in his long critique (to call it that) on some verses of Vergil he gives a fine practical demonstration of how to get the blood of a turnip out of the pulp of a pear. What Vergil never dreamed of is what the critic is most busied withal.

From the glimpses we have given one might safely guess what Montaigne's manner, as a philosopher, would be. He admits that his aim in writing the "Essais" was to make a patchwork without form, flung together as if by chance, adding that his book would not have a likeness in all literature. He has been denounced as an infidel: he was not one; nor was he a skeptic in the narrow sense. His philoso-

phy was sincerity itself, which he urged to the excess of unbridled coarseness, so much did he dread the appearance of mincing the truth. Certainly he called a spade a spade without wincing. The church did not escape his open-handed liberality of investigation, but at bottom he was not irreverent; he frankly applied such common sense as he possessed to everything that challenged his reason. In those days the priestly attitude was far more jealous than it is now; both the Catholic and the Protestant went about grimly, chip on shoulder, hankering for trouble. Montaigne kept near the middle of the road with his genial "que scays je?" and prodded carelessly to left and right with a dangerous boar-spear, as if it were the gentlest thing in the world to impale something alive and sacred to the ignorance and superstition of his time. It was his way of showing his impartiality and his amiable temper. With such an air of innocence and with so many self-accusations and protestations of invalidism and approaching senility did he potter

away at his doubt-building that it was impossible to avoid humoring him. If he hit you on the ear, he immediately jabbed his own nose, so that the score was even and resentment out of the question. You actually sympathized with your assailant's mood, and regretted that he had punished himself so rashly, albeit justly.

He saw that quackery was at its highest in his day, and he gave the doctors of medicine hard blows under cover of a delightful humor. Hear him speak of "cette grimace rebarbatifve" with which they went about! He had a sense of the grim trick of it all. He trusted to nature, and died of a quinsy at fifty-nine. But there was a larger quackery into which he poured a curious, flickering, and wandering sidelight of examination. He would tell the "effect of things," he said. Where will this lead us to? What do we expect to discover on this road? These were his inquiries; but he had so harmless an air that no person seeing him would suspect him of delving deep by the wayside. Neither Calvin nor the Pope could have

condemned him outright; he fought so cleverly for and against both. The doctors of divinity fared as doubtfully at his hands as the dispensers of drugs; yet who treated religion more honestly than he?

Montaigne was a lord; he lived at a time and in a country not the least suited to our present political ideas, certainly not encouraging to democratic liberty. In some way, however, he reached a point of view from which he looked over into the fair domain of human brotherhood. While stickling for the distinction of conventional nobility he laid down the broad rule of individual liberty and manhood equality. Freedom was a personal right, as he regarded it, a self-privilege, with the function of examining and deciding all things. What is seen is seen through one's self; what is known is known through one's self. The man is all men to himself. "La plus grande chose du monde, c'est de scavoir estre à soy." ("The greatest thing in the world is to know how to belong to one's self.") Upon this sort of foundation-

blocks he built, better, perhaps, than he knew. It was a point of view which showed him that the Turks, and even the beasts of the field, were less savage than the hordes of Christians wading in human blood all over Europe. He reasoned that a Turk was but a Turk, a dog but a dog; a Christian ought to be but a Christian. Is it heresy to expect Christ's followers to show the world a sweet life and a noble aspiration? We have no trouble making out Montaigne's innocence of mere polemical destructiveness, when we keep in mind his surroundings. In the name of Christ men were robbers, murderers, devastators. Pizarro and De Soto were his contemporaries; from his tower at Montaigne he could see the smoke of torment, could hear the clash of foray, could smell the effluence of carnage, all under the banner of the cross. In his philosophy there was room to doubt the agreement of cause and effect. He doubted then, as the best Christians doubt now, and had the hardihood to set down upon paper just what was in his mind, as Christians are not apt

to do now—for fear of losing a professorship, a pulpit, a vote, or a shop-customer!

Montaigne would have regarded our recent reformers with a very casual interest. His sympathies stopped short of every plan for making human nature over again and thus eliminating evil. It was his best business to observe,

> with eye serene,
> The very pulse of the machine.

Why look at ethics with a pretense of bilious melancholy and atonic weakness? Does salvation depend upon refusing to smile when you are amused? Must the human being wither, deny its functions, die a mummy, in order to flourish in heaven? As for doing evil, that is another thing; but evil seemed to him not possessed of so broad a field as the church would insist upon granting to it. "Il fault retenir, à tout nos dents et nos griffes, l'usage des plaisirs de la vie." ("We must hold, with teeth and nails, to the practice of life's pleasures.") It is a good rule; but the individual claiming

under it may, as did Montaigne himself, sometimes construe pleasure to mean too much for safe morals.

Set a rogue to catch a rogue; but a philosopher is a poor spy. I am not surprised at Emerson's failure to detect Montaigne. Goethe and Byron fell further short. The sage of Périgord took himself *flagrante delicto*, and was delighted with turning himself over bodily to justice. His philosophy forced him upon his own boar-spear, where he writhed, greatly amused, as a dreadful example of what man looked like, viewed from his window. He knew that no man's knowledge was complete, be the man saint or sinner, Pope or reformer, and his "que scays je?" was but the radical sign over the doubt of each honest soul. How far, in fact, does my absolute knowledge go? The root of the problem is plus or minus, but never a perfect number to any person.

Montaigne did not philosophize for philosophers; the estimate of his work with a pen, recorded by himself, is that it suits the need of average men. What

Goethe, or Byron, or Emerson, or their likes, might find admirable or faulty in his chatty remarks was of less moment than the stories told him by his servant-man who had been in America and knew something about the habits and customs of savages. It was not much to him that Calvin said this or that; his tailor-boy was a great liar,—would not tell the truth even when truth would best serve his purpose,—and there was matter for thought. The tailor-boy was more like the average man than John Calvin or Martin Luther. When he quoted from Horace, or Plutarch, or Plato, it was not to tickle the ears of scholars; the sayings of Aristotle or of Diogenes were not stones to be flung at the head of a king; everything was offered to the bluff, honest, average mind. "I should like to die planting my cabbages." "I prefer second or third place in Périgord to first place in Paris." He liked to converse with peasants, adventurers, country gentlemen. It was thus he got close to real life, and his philosophy was simply facts followed by a question-mark.

A mind like Montaigne's is aware that reform is an infection, not a contagion—a germ in the air, not a private leaven in the pot of a zealot. He knew that Luther was not the real power of the tidal wave then shaking the foundations of medieval Christian religion, but only the stormy petrel winging fierce circles just above the waves. He knew that Calvin was not Christ come again; the recent things were not the old things revived; the reformers were but creatures of the average aspiration, mere voices of the average need of the time. And so, without premeditation or plan, the Seigneur de Montaigne gave to paper and immortality a record of his thoughts right in the midst of an epoch-making throe of the world. Tesla, in his quiet study or workshop, at this moment of calm and peace, is not more oblivious of cataclysmal war than was Montaigne in his defenseless château with the very earth rocking under him. Little cared he for the tides of progress beginning to foam. His day was good enough for him, and "if I could chock our wheel, and stop it

right here," he remarks, "I would do it with good heart." All that he sought to do, all that he did, was to look into himself and write, not to build a philosophy, not to reform the world, but merely to unload his mind of a plethora of sincerities as contradictory, as coarse, as refined, as groveling, and as lofty as human nature itself.

REARED in affluence, at a time when affluence almost demanded excesses bordering on the brutal,—for the feast was a gorge, conviviality meant probable rest under the table, in those days,—Montaigne early contracted physical maladies of a sort to affect a man's temper. The red wines of Médoc could not charm away the avenger of mensal excesses to which were added less venial affronts to corporal soundness; besides, there was pestilence blowing on almost every wind in and out, with Bordeaux as a center. War, itself a disease, scattered plague-seeds,—microbes fortunately had not been discovered,—while alternations of famine and plethora

did what absolute ignorance of sanitary science suggested. So it is well to bear in mind that, like Carlyle, Montaigne was a literary invalid; but, like Burns and Lamb, he gained by suffering, if not absolute Greek joyousness, certainly a fine jocund air, which refracts our rays of vision and hangs a glamour over his most amazing improprieties.

We have remarked that his education could scarcely have been better suited to his need as an essayist; but education includes more than mere schooling. The historic atmosphere in which a man lived —the ozone and the miasma of his time— must always be taken largely into our measurements of what he knew and how he was influenced by it. Montaigne's father probably noticed, being a curious and shrewd person, that Michel, his third son, had an extraordinary mind, for he began, in the boy's early childhood, experimenting upon his intelligence with unorthodox modes of teaching. The future essayist was cradled and suckled by a peasant woman, and his first six years were spent

among plebeian children, while Latin was dinned in his ears by tutors who could not speak French. At the same time Greek had a turn at him with the aid of an object-lesson performance.

Montaigne, the château where Michel was born, a little way from Bordeaux, attracted attention in those days, and has ever since, being one of the favored spots sought out by distinguished wayfarers and avoided by plunderers. The boy had his run there before going down to the Collége de Guienne, where he began in his seventh year, with such teachers as George Buchanan and Marc Antoine Muret, the curious course then set for pupils of tender age. And for seven years he was ground between the upper and nether stones of that huge mill, where two thousand boys like him swelled a universal tide of longing for release. Then, not yet fourteen, he escaped from the college and took up the study of law! A year later we find him watching the progress of a riot in Bordeaux; and when he was about twenty-five he saw the siege of Thionville, at

which time he was a counselor in the Parliament of Bordeaux, evidently not without distinction.

Montaigne married at the age of thirty-three. He had seen all sides of life, taken his fill of pleasures, and now he felt the need of rural quietude in which he could nurse his lesions, if not to a cure, at least with great benefit. His elder brothers had died, likewise his father, leaving him the estates and the family title; therefore, in 1571, his thirty-eighth year, already broken physically beyond permanent cure, he went to live at the château of Montaigne, where the literary bee, long humming in his bonnet, began to sting him sorely. He sharpened some quills and fell to jotting down his thoughts.

Montaigne's schooling had been curiously literary and dramatic, under the influence of the extreme classicism with which his great contemporary, Ronsard, gave a new brilliance to French poetry; but the genius of the essayist struck through its academic cocoon and took life at first hand; it used the books of the

dead past as stepping-stones to cross the streams of his own inquiry, and somewhat, too, it must be admitted, for mere pedantic ornamentation cleverly set into the structure of his work. There is not a trace of genuine poetry in the "Essais," save what is quoted from other writers; every drive of the pen is at a fact, or what was thought to be the significance of a fact, in the spirit of modern science, if not in its light, and with what modern science seems strangely afraid of—style. While everything was fish for his net, nothing was too trivial to be well said.

Into the composition of an essay he put the winnowed observations of all his past life bearing in any degree upon the subject in hand, together with what wide ransacking of books had afforded him in available form. He had a great memory, as is shown by his quotations, slight lapses from accuracy proving that they were not copied directly, but as recollected; and his sense of that armorphous grace, which is the essay's stamp of structure, was faultless. He built walls of rubble; but no

stone was chosen that had not an attractive side to be turned outward. He had taste, even when coarseness overcame him.

It might seem, to a careless onlooker, that an essay, like the best of Montaigne's, could be just as well written in a dozen different ways. The experiment has been often tried, only with the result of testifying against the main theory. Lamb caught Montaigne's trick of structure in a remarkable degree; but compare Théophile Gautier's essays with Montaigne's, and note the difference. The materials most searched for by Gautier and his disciples were words and the phrase; splendor of diction, kaleidoscopic phrase-setting, the paragraph turned with Giotto's sweep of perfection—these were of first dignity in their esteem; but the old essayist bent his genius hard upon the things he had in mind to say, and it was his steadfastness in concentrating his reason, while amusing himself with crystals of fact, that gave form to his work.

Considering the state of human knowledge at the middle of the sixteenth cen-

tury, it is amazing to review the range and variety of Montaigne's facts. He dug at the root of everything in sight—with a primitive hoe, to be sure; and the bulbs he unearthed have been but slightly modified by three centuries of tireless cultivation. It is his way of whistling and soliloquizing while at work, however, that most captivates us; there his humor breaks forth, and there his gentle virility flowers; we look ahead, while deep in his philosophy, for the next shallowing and rippling of the stream, —almost any figure will serve in speaking of the "Essais,"—and are not in the least surprised no matter what comes to the surface; for his materials, although they appear hopelessly incongruous, somehow fall together and generate beautiful affinities, or some filament of delicious sophistry joins them as a spider's web links drops of dew and dangling flies.

In the forty-sixth essay of the first book we have a peep at the method used by Montaigne in collecting his materials. It is not an essay, but the outline of one, a succession of items with running remarks

—he calls it a *galimafrée*—on the subject of names. It forms itself, as it progresses, after the fashion of a rolling snowball, that takes up chips, stones, leaves, and what not, as well as snow, then begins to tumble into pieces of its own weight, but continues to roll and gather. One thing about this galimafrée (pot o' hash) is that an essay on names cannot be written without using its materials. They are the cream of the subject—or is hash made of cream?—down to Montaigne's date. The same may be said about almost every one of the "Essais."

Leisure is the nurse, ease the cradle, of the essay; but when we remember that Montaigne was writing his incomparable jumbles in the midst of that awful struggle called the Civil Wars, we must recognize the great exception. He was the literary hero of dying medieval history; his pen scratched its precious pot-hooks gaily through an eightfold storm of murder, and he passed away six years before the Edict of Nantes was issued. Yet what almost infinite show of untroubled calm

in his writings! It seems probable that he played the interesting invalid's tune to all the rough riders of those days when they arrived at the château, as he certainly did to the people of Bordeaux when he was their mayor and a dire pestilence struck them. He shied off to his country-seat and nursed his own health.

But from his undefended room he looked forth upon the life around him, permitting no detail to go by without scrutiny. He had the sensitiveness of great genius to drafts from the future, and he felt the coming changes in science, literature, art, religion, life—saw forward almost to Browning and the agnostics, backward to the horizon. And over all this space his mind was a somewhat whimsical drag-net, with meshes small enough for minnows and strong enough for leviathan.

Montaigne's life spanned the period from 1533 to 1592, which, in French history, incloses as much song as war. He was the contemporary of Ronsard, Régnier, Olivier de Magny, Louise Labé, and the "Pléiade"—that hive of busy hum-

mers; but, admirable critic though he was, he had not tried creative work and failed, in order to prove his capacity for pointing out the failures and successes of others. Nor yet, with the charming tinkle of Marot's *blasons* and *coq à l'âne*, and the clever turns of Brodeau's new rondeaus in his ears, and with Marguerite of Angoulême still singing when he was a lad, did he give the warblers any distinguished notice, but gathered from them, by that indirect mode of observation peculiar to born essayists, many a delicate turn of diction and here and there a brilliant flash of irony.

Not by choice, but by force of temperament and the trend of the times, he found himself occupying a point of view on the ground between Rome and Reformation, in a skeptical attitude toward both, yet too well saturated with the religion in which he was born to die outside its forms. He may be taken, as Emerson took him, for the type-specimen of the genus doubter; but his doubts were not mere polemical stones hurled at sacred traditions. He

wished to investigate every subject for himself, and as far as his light reached he did investigate right independently. A large and significant part of his materials was drawn from the field of thought opened by the frightful religious battles of his time. He went about open-eyed, eager to discover the "why" of things, as much pleased with a ground for curious conjecture as was Gilbert White with a swallow's burrow, or Izaak Walton at sight of a trout-pool.

Montaigne's materials, however, were chosen for the essay's sake more than for philosophy's sake or close argument's sake, as any reader can see as he runs. What he aimed at was a rosary of facts, anecdotes, examples, instances, strung upon a thread of impartial comment, which should disguise as much as betray his own private theory. The modern "scientific" pose is a vast exaggeration of his attitude. His skepticism forced him hard back upon nature, where he boldly took himself to deep water, laughing all the time in frank acknowledgment of that

ludicrous figure, his own image in the flood; for he was always sincere and always just.

Emerson has dissected Montaigne's skepticism with keen precision; but he failed to comprehend how the needs of the essayist interfered with the philosopher's investigations. "'T is of no importance what bats and oxen think," he observes; but Montaigne was of a different opinion. To him one thing was about as important as another. The religion of Christ served him no better for a chatty essay than liars, or smells, or pedantry, or names, or the vanities of speech. Whatever happened to challenge his spirit of inquiry suggested an essay as a main object, and he rummaged his memory and experience and foraged in books for wherewithal to build it. In very large part his materials were literary—that is, they were selected with a view to literary art, and not for investigation's sake alone. Much of his skepticism comes out incidentally while he is chinking up the crevices of his work.

Finally, we may say that Montaigne's

personal intercourse with men of every degree furnished him rich materials for his work. It might be Amyot, grand almoner of France under Charles IX, told him an anecdote of the Duc de Guise at the siege of Rouen, or it might be a sailor, just returned from newly discovered America, who described the savages to him; a servant did this, or Cicero had said that: it was all material and welcome to his pot of galimafrée.

There was, after all, this great lack in the taste which governed Montaigne's intellectual and moral activities: he felt little of what may be called nature's purple atmosphere; romance scarcely appealed at all to his mind, and still less did the manifold beauties of landscape, birds, flowers, brooks, clouds, horizons affect him. He glanced forth casually, and remarked: "Touts nos efforts ne peuvent seulement arriver à representer le nid du moindre oyselet, sa contexture, sa beaulté, et l'utilité de son usage; non la tissure de la chestifve araignee." ("All our efforts cannot reach to reproducing the nest of the

tiniest little bird, its structure, beauty, adaptability; not even the web of the wretched spider.") Then, without further notice of what the splendid face of nature wore on its ever fresh features, he turned back to Plato and Vergil, Aristotle and Cicero, inquiring of them about himself; or he resumed the leisurely discussion of some general human frailty. And his intelligence, as Pater says, "dividing evidence so finely, like some exquisite steel instrument with impeccable sufficiency," was not to be turned aside or used in the dissection of those haunting dream-clouds forever hovering near us.

But the sun went down low in the west; the shadows coalesced; a mocking-bird's vesper sweetness rang far, and its tenderness spread apace with a hint of twilight. The dogwood-blossoms flickered strangely, while on the air a woodsy scent—a dewy mold-fragrance—increased until there was a hint of danger in it. How long ago Montaigne lived! Where is he now? Far off a horned owl hooted dolefully; so I gathered up my books, shook my mind,

as it were, whistled to challenge the mocking-bird, and while the sky softened to receive the stars, and the distant mellow boom of the sea became a significant part of approaching night, I trudged homeward, wondering what good thing would prevail at dinner. "Ce n'est pas raison que l'art gaigne le poinct d'honneur sur nostre grande et puissante mère nature." ("There is no reason that art should gain the point of honor over our great and powerful mother nature.")